The BELL HAVEN FIVE

GEORGE BARTON

To Glen Stanley
Birth day Feb. 18th 192
from Mother.

He Played With a Fury Born of Desperation.

THE BELL HAVEN FIVE

BY

GEORGE BARTON

Author of "The Bell Haven Nine," "The Bell Haven Eight," etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY

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PHILADELPHIA

THE JOHN C. WINSTON COMPANY

PUBLISHERS

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To

CHARLES H. HEUSTIS

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THE BELL HAVEN FIVE

CHAPTER I

ADAM GETS A TELEGRAM

BELL HAVEN had its traditions, one of which concerned a fortune that was to come some day, in some way, to Adam, the janitor and man of all work at the school. The venerable one neither admitted nor denied the rumors of his prospective wealth, and this non-committal attitude, in the minds of many, simply had the effect of confirming the common report.

It was generally believed that the wealth in question was to come from an uncle who lived in the far West and who had not seen Adam for many years. The mysterious relative was reported to be very old, but the report was doubted by some of the boys, who could not imagine how a white-haired man like Adam could possibly have

an uncle in the land of the living. Others, more sagacious and knowing, insisted that old men sometimes not only have uncles, but fathers and grandfathers who were so very aged that they could not even remember when they were born.

The discussion was running high just about the time Bobby Benson returned for his third year at Bell Haven. He was cordially greeted by his classmates and the other boys of the Academy who had come to look on him as a friend in whom they had a right to take an honest pride. He had grown several inches taller and he carried himself with an air of confidence that was justified in one who had been captain of the champion baseball team in his first year and who had pulled an oar in the Bell Haven Eight during his second term.

Pinky Palmer, tall, thin and as wiry as ever, reported the same day, and the boys had a merry time reviving memories of the previous two years and recounting the adventures which had befallen them during the vacation period. There was quite a

gathering in Bobby Benson's room in the main dormitory that night, and among those who dropped in to join in the talk were John Forbes—who was best known as the Sleeping Beauty—Gordon Greely and Nelson James. Tramp, the yellow dog, who enjoyed the unique distinction of being the mascot of the Bell Haven Academy, was there, of course, and with sundry barks and yelps seemed to be as much at home as any of the boys.

"Say, Bobby," remarked Forbes, "did you hear anything about Adam's fortune?"

"Sure," was the quick reply; "has he come into it yet?"

"I don't know, but I've been wondering whether the old chap really had one coming to him."

"Of course he has," replied Benson with a careless disregard of details; "we've all got a fortune coming to us sometime."

"Don't be smart," retorted the fat boy; "you know what I mean, all right. Is this a real fortune or only a fairy story?"

Bobby's face lightened with the smile which invariably illumined his whole coun-

tenance, and his brown eyes sparkled with the spirit of good nature.

"To tell the truth, Forbsey, I don't know a thing about it."

"Why don't you?" exploded the Sleeping Beauty. "I hate mysteries, and this thing has half the boys in the school standing on their heads."

Benson looked at the speaker in a quizzical manner and said:

"I'll tell you who can give you all the information you want."

"Who?"

"Adam!"

"Say!" ejaculated Forbes, advancing in a menacing way, "I want you to stop kiddin' me or I'll punch your head."

Bobby leaned back in his chair and laughed with such evident enjoyment that the stout one joined in the mirth in spite of his gust of anger.

"I'm giving you a straight tip," persisted Benson. "Adam knows more about this than any other man in Bell Haven."

"He'd never tell me," was the rueful response.

"What's the matter with you fellows?" broke in Pinky Palmer. "You're like a lot of old gossips. What difference does it make whether Adam has an uncle or not? And if he has one that's left him a fortune, it's none of your business."

"I beg your pardon," corrected Bobby, "but everything that concerns Bell Haven concerns us and Forbsey's perfectly right in wanting to know all about it."

"That's the way to talk, old top," cried the Sleeping Beauty, giving Benson a resounding slap on the back. "I always said you had more sense than anybody in this blooming place."

A chorus of laughter greeted this remark and out of it was heard the voice of Nelson James inquiring:

"Then why don't you do as Bobby says, and go ask Adam to tell you the news?"

Forbes made a wry face.

"What? And have him get after me with a barrel stave? Not if your Uncle Dudley knows himself, and he thinks he does. There's only one boy here that dare do it and that's Mister Robert Benson.

He's got Adam hypnotized. He'd tell Bobby anything. He's the boy for the job."

"Will you do it, Bobby?" asked Pinky Palmer, curiously.

"Sure," was the ready response, "but you'll have to let me do it in my own way. I may have to use a little diplomacy. Adam's a peculiar man. He's talkative enough sometimes, but he may not want to open the family closet and rattle the skeletons for the sake of a bunch of newsy boys."

"But you'll do it, won't you?" persisted Forbes.

"I promise," was the reply, with a solemnity that made the boys laugh.

The next day Benson kept a sharp outlook for the janitor in the hope of finding an opportunity for gaining the information so eagerly sought by his chums. He was rewarded sooner than he expected. It was early in the afternoon when he saw Adam driving from the station with two new boys whose arrival for the fall term had been somewhat delayed. The venerable

one sat on the front seat of the Germantown wagon clucking to the ancient mare in the old familiar style.

"Gid-dup!" he clucked to the animal. "Gid-dup, you old bunch of bones; d'ye think I've got all day to git to the Academy?"

"Hello, Adam," greeted the boy from the roadside; "what have you got there?"

The driver waved his whip in a friendly salutation.

"Got some raw material here," he grinned, "and it's up to you fellows to turn it into the finished article."

The two new boys listened to the strange conversation with open-eyed wonder, and Bobby noting their awed looks felt a twinge of compassion as he recalled the feeling of loneliness that had overcome him on his first arrival at Bell Haven. But he had something more important to think of at the moment, and as he trotted along by the side of the vehicle he continued his efforts to get into the good graces of the white-haired janitor.

"How have you been?" he cried.

"As fine as a fiddle," replied Adam. "If

I was any better I'd have to send for the doctor."

Bobby pretended to laugh so heartily at this ancient jest that it warmed the heart of his aged friend.

"Go on around to my rooms," he said. "I'll be there as soon as I get rid of these boys and put the team up."

This was the very opportunity the young strategist had been wishing for, and he slowly made his way to the little frame house adjoining the Academy grounds where the janitor made his home. Mrs. Bowen, the motherly looking landlady, greeted him at the door, and when she learned his mission, said with a laugh:

"You jest go up to his rooms and make yourself to home. I've got some pies in the oven and I've got to stay in the kitchen."

The boy followed directions and found himself in the large apartment which served the janitor in the double capacity of a bed-chamber and sitting room. It was not richly furnished, but it had an air of comfort that was decidedly inviting. The bed was in one corner and a marble-topped

table occupied the center of the room. This contained a family Bible, a catalogue of the Bell Haven Academy and a little volume on the care of horses, illustrating, as it were, the extent of Adam's devotional, literary and material interests. The remainder of the furnishing consisted of an ingrain carpet, three hair-cloth chairs and a sofa of the vintage of 1812. Bobby occupied his time by reading the prospectus of the Academy and he was still engaged in this when Adam burst into the room in his hearty, good-natured way.

"Hello, son!" he cried. "Makin' yourself to home in my nest?"

"I'm trying to."

"It's not exactly up to date, but it's good enough for an old cart-horse like me."

"I think it's very comfortable," said Bobby, honestly enough.

Adam stroked his long white beard and pointed to the three chairs and the sofa.

"I suppose you include the antiques in your testimonial?"

"Certainly," laughed Benson.

"Been in the family many years," com-

mented Adam. "Mrs. Bowen's always talkin' about puttin' modern stuff in their place, but they suit me all right."

Bobby had risen while the conversation was going on, but the venerable one waved him to a chair.

"Sit down—we don't stand on any ceremony here."

Benson did as he was requested and Adam, going to the closet, pulled out a little sewing basket. He seated himself on one side of the aged sofa and began stitching a black band around his hat.

"When a man's single," he said apologetically, "he's got to work like a woman."

"What's the matter," asked Bobby, sympathetically, "had a death in the family?"

"Yes, that uncle of mine out in Chicago's gone the voyage at last."

"That's too bad," remarked the visitor.

"Well," drawled Adam, the corners of his eyes wrinkling into a shrewd smile, "he had to die some time, an' as he was over ninety I s'pose he thought he might as well have it over with."

"You're sorry, of course?" ventured the boy.

"Yes, I am," admitted Adam, "an' can you guess why?"

"No."

"Well, Uncle Silas took me to the circus once when I was a boy and I ain't never forgotten it. You do a good turn for a boy an' the memory of it's goin' to last forever. Do somethin' mean an' he'll never forget it neither."

"Did—did he remember you in his will?" asked Bobby, hesitatingly.

Adam looked at him questioningly.

"Kind o' young to be thinkin' about money, ain't you, son?" he said presently, and then added with a humorous twinkle in his eyes, "Allus be contented with your lot—'specially if it's a corner lot."

But Bobby had gone too far to be put off in that fashion.

"Am I to understand that your Uncle Silas has cut you off without a shilling?" he asked with a laugh.

Adam stroked his beard reflectively.

"To tell the truth, I don't know whether

he left any money or not," he confessed, "but what I was drivin' at was that we should all try to save a little fur ourselves, lay by somethin' fur a rainy day—even if it's only a pair of rubber boots."

A tap at the door interrupted the conversation and when Adam called "come in" Mrs. Bowen entered, holding the corner of her apron in one hand and a telegram in the other. It was for Adam, and after he had opened and read it, he handed it to Bobby with a smile.

"Maybe that'll answer your question," he said.

The boy skimmed over the message which was from a firm of lawyers in Chicago and contained these significant words:

> You are requested to come here in person at your earliest convenience for the purpose of assisting in the settlement of your late uncle's estate.

"That sounds like money," smilingly commented Bobby as he returned the telegram to Adam.

"Yes, it does," admitted the white-

haired one, "if a bit of yellow paper has any sound."

It was necessary to show the telegram to Dr. Maury and after the head of the Bell Haven Academy had heard all of the details, he readily granted the janitor leave of absence, in order that he might attend to what was probably regarded as important business. The venerable one had never been further West than Buffalo and the prospective trip was naturally looked on as an epoch in his long and uneventful life.

He began his preparations at once and by the following afternoon was ready for the journey. He carried a straw-colored suitcase, and Bobby Benson and Pinky Palmer appointed themselves a committee of two to escort him to the station. He was as nervous as a bridegroom and he repeatedly shook hands with the two boys with the fervor of one who is about to travel to the other end of the earth. He stood on the rear platform of the last car as the train pulled out and waved his big red handkerchief to the youngsters.

"Good-bye, boys," he called, "an' take care of yourselves while I'm away."

CHAPTER II

THE BASKETBALL TEAM

THE fall term was still in its infancy when the boys began to discuss the desirability of organizing a basketball team. The success of the Bell Haven Nine and also the interest aroused by the showing of the crew were cited as reasons why the new sport should be introduced at the Academy. Besides, Bobby Benson and Pinky Palmer who had retired from the baseball team in order to make place for some of the newer boys, were anxious for another game which required speed and skill.

A meeting to talk over the project was held in the rooms of Mike Murray, the veteran trainer of the Academy. He was strongly in favor of the proposed team, saying that the game was one that called for alertness and quick thinking and thus exercised both the body and the mind.

As a result of the preliminary talk a committee was appointed to wait on Dr. Maury, the head of the school, in order to get his permission to go ahead with the organization. The boys who called on him found him in a receptive mood. He interposed no objection and expressed the hope that the Bell Haven Five would be successful and bring as much fame to the Academy as had the other teams.

Notices were posted stating that any of the students who desired to join the team would be given a try-out in the gymnasium. Fifteen boys appeared at the appointed time and were put through a severe test by the trainer. There was a short scrimmage, lasting about ten minutes, during which time no attempts were made at the goal. It was a case of merely getting possession of the ball and keeping it away from the opposing team.

"Now, boys," said Murray to the youngsters, "I want you to understand that the secret of success in this game is action. Never stand still for a second. Don't try for any individual records, but keep the

ball in motion. Later on I shall point out the special requirements of the different positions. Now go to it."

And they went "to it" with a willingness that was good to behold. Indeed, in the very first round Pinky Palmer and the Sleeping Beauty had a collision that sent them sprawling on the slippery floor. Pinky got a bump on the forehead which produced a swelling half the size of an egg, while Forbes lay there many minutes gasping for breath. But the application of cold water and arnica soon brought them to their senses and the practice was renewed with redoubled vigor.

So many of the boys made a good showing that the veteran trainer decided that it would require another try-out before he was able to decide who were eligible for the team. The second test was held on the following afternoon, but by that time three of the students had voluntarily dropped from the list. They decided that the play was a little too strenuous for them.

"All right," ejaculated Mike Murray, with a characteristic grunt and toss of the

head, "now's the time to know whether you can stand the strain. It's just as well to feel at the outset that this is not a game for babes and sucklings."

"What's he mean by that?" asked Forbes, turning to Benson with one of his contagious grins.

"He means that no mollycoddles need apply," was the quick retort.

Practice was resumed at the blow of the whistle and for the next ten minutes there was a rush and a clatter and a tossing of the ball that evoked the enthusiastic applause of the little knot of spectators. At one stage of the game the Sleeping Beauty reached for the handkerchief in his hip pocket.

"Hey, there, Forbes, no loafing," shouted the relentless trainer.

"I'm not loafing," ruefully replied the stout one; "I was only going to wipe the sweat off me manly brow."

"Do that during the intermission. We can't stand for any such lady-like business while the ball is in motion."

"Well, what do you think of that?" was

the mocking retort, but before Murray could say anything more, Forbes had resumed play and in a thrice was in the thick of the scrimmage.

Mike Murray was anxious to select five boys who could be depended upon for team work, and long before the second session ended he mentally decided that Bobby Benson would not only be a member of the team but that he should be the captain of the Bell Haven Five. Benson was taller than any of the other boys and he had developed the faculty of leadership to a high degree. This often occurs with both boys and men. Such persons have vim and push, and without premeditation they step in and take charge of affairs while others are standing around wondering what is best to be done.

At the close of that afternoon's work, Mike Murray announced the names of ten boys who were to constitute the organization. Five were to be in the regular line-up, while the remainder were to be within call in case of any emergencies that might arise. Four of the five regulars were

selected on the spot. They were Bobby Benson, center and captain, Pinky Palmer and Gordon Greely as forwards, and Nelson James as guard. The second guard and fifth member of the team he said he would decide upon within the next few days.

Forbes was deeply disappointed that he was not named as the fifth member of the regular team. Usually his bubbling good nature was inextinguishable, but on this occasion he could not conceal his depression. He gave utterance to what was in his mind on the way to the dormitories.

"Say, Pinky," he said with characteristic bluntness, "is Murray trying to throw the harpoon into me?"

"Why?"

"Why? You red-headed shrimp, you know why. He didn't pick me for the team. For all I know I'm going through the term as a sub. I want to make the regular team."

"Maybe he thinks you're lighter in your head than you are on your feet," teased the auburn-haired one.

"That's unkind—especially from a rattle-

brain like you," retorted the Sleeping Beauty.

"So it is, Forbes," confessed Pinky, "and I take it back, every word of it."

The stout boy's face cleared in an instant, because he knew that behind the bantering tone lay a wealth of good will and affection.

"Honestly now, what do you think was the trouble?"

"Well," said Palmer, "if you really must know, it's my opinion that you were not as fast as you might have been. You've got to be on the jump in this game. It's different from baseball or rowing or any other sport I can think of—the only time you have to rest is when the whistle blows."

"Say, Pinky," said the stout boy dolorously, "it'll break my heart if I don't make the basketball team. I've been expecting to get on it from the minute it was mentioned."

"That's the answer," was Pinky's brisk reply.

"I don't understand you."

"Your mind must be getting sluggish," was the boy-like retort. "I mean that

you've been suffering from a bad case of over-confidence—sometimes called swelled head."

"That's not so, Palmer, and you know it," cried Forbes hotly.

"There you go again, telling me I don't know what I'm talking about," countered Pinky.

"Oh, I don't mean that—I mean that I hadn't any thought of the swelled head."

"I know it, Forbes," agreed the red-haired one; "I'm sure it wasn't intentional, but sometimes a fellow acts as if he had a swollen cranium and that hurts him almost as much as if he really had the big head."

"Well it's not true with me," was the decided retort.

"Your apology is accepted," laughed Pinky lightly.

"Yes, but that don't get me on the team," said Forbes bitterly.

"I'll speak to Mike Murray and see if you've got any chance."

"I wish you would," cried the Sleeping Beauty. "I don't ask for any odds. If

he's got a better boy, all right; but I don't want to be shut out on account of some imaginary fault."

"Are you willing to go into another practice exhibition?"

"You just bet your sweet life I am."

"Well, I'll see if it is possible to do anything."

Pinky Palmer and Bobby Benson were out of bed at seven o'clock next morning. They decided on a long walk before breakfast and agreed on the river bank as the most desirable place for their purpose. As they passed the gymnasium, queer sounds came through the window of that place. It was Pinky who first noticed the noise. He turned to Benson.

"That's funny, Bobby."

"Why?"

"No one would use the gym at such an unearthly hour. I wonder if thieves could have crept in the joint?"

"I dunno," rejoined Bobby; "let's go in and see."

So they crept up softly until they were beside the building. A convenient soap

box enabled Pinky to stand on his tip-toes and peep inside.

"Suffering cats!" he ejaculated.

"What is it?" asked Benson in an awed voice. "Burglars?"

"No," and Pinky began to laugh violently.

"What is it?" demanded Bobby testily.

"You couldn't guess in a thousand years, so I'll have to tell you. It's Forbsey."

"The dickens you say," and the next instant Benson was beside Palmer on the soap box, peeping into the window.

He chuckled with delight, and no wonder, for the Sleeping Beauty was at work with two other boys, tossing a basketball to and fro with a persistence and speed that was truly amazing. He did not see the two pair of eyes that were spying on him, and kept at work as if his eternal salvation depended upon the outcome. A second glance revealed the other two boys as Gordon Greely and Nelson James. They were as keenly interested as the Sleeping Beauty and from time to time they shouted signals which were intended to assist Forbes.

"Good scouts, the both of 'em," whispered Bobby to Pinky. "They're trying to beat him into shape so that he'll get on the team."

Pinky nodded his head in understanding and then said reflectively:

"Just to think, last year I had Gordon Greely marked down as a cheap skate—a black sheep."

"He was black enough in the beginning, all right," commented Bobby, "but he changed his color before the season was over."

Forbes wore a red sweater that was sleeveless, a pair of white swimming tights and gymnasium slippers. He had evidently been working for some time because he was perspiring freely and breathing heavily. The two boys had just noticed this when they saw Mike Murray, the trainer, walking down the graveled path toward the gate. Benson called to him loudly. He halted and the two boys rushed over to where he was standing.

"I want you to peep into the gym for a moment."

Curiously, Murray did as he was requested. The sight of the Sleeping Beauty struggling so furiously brought a smile to his shrewd face.

"He's not as lazy as I thought," he commented, and with these words he made for the door of the building followed by Benson and Palmer. The three boys in the gymnasium suddenly halted at sight of the unexpected visitors. It was the Sleeping Beauty who came forward to greet them with an unwonted air of bashfulness.

"Good morning, Mr. Murray," he said.

The trainer nodded in his brisk way. "I see you've been at work," he remarked.

"Yes," said Forbes shyly. "I've been trying to get into shape."

Murray reached into his inside pocket for a little pass book and made a memorandum. He replaced the book and turned and walked away. This was too much for the Sleeping Beauty.

"I say, Mr. Murray!" he cried.

"Well?" asked the other, halting.

"Won't you give me another test to see if I'm fit for the regular team?"

"You're on the team," was the brisk retort. "I've just put your name down. A fellow that's willing to turn out before breakfast to get into condition has the right sort of stuff in him."

And he marched away, leaving Forbes in a half-dazed condition, while the other boys slapped him on the back, shook his hands and otherwise gave evidences of the lively satisfaction they felt.

CHAPTER III

ADAM WRITES A LETTER

IT seemed strange at Bell Haven without Adam. He had been guide, friend and philosopher to most of the boys and he was as intimate and familiar to them as the front door of the Academy or the big bell in the cupola. He had gone away, occasionally, for a day or two at a time, but never for a period long enough to attract attention; but now he had been absent for more than two weeks and some of them began to wonder when he would return.

Not the least curious among the boys were Bobby Benson and Pinky Palmer. Both had a real affection for the ancient janitor and the possibility that he might never return disturbed them more than they cared to confess. It was on the fifteenth morning after Adam's departure that they sat in Bobby Benson's room in the dormitory discussing the subject.

"You don't suppose, do you," began Benson, "that the old man's shaken the dust of Bell Haven from his feet forever?"

"What!" ejaculated Pinky with a comical twist of his mouth. "Adam shake Bell Haven? Why, Bobby, you're raving. He couldn't live without this old shop. He'd just die of loneliness. He thinks the only air that's fit to breathe is the air of this old town. And this Academy is his father, mother and sweetheart, all rolled into one. Leave Bell Haven! Why, Bobby, I'm ashamed of you to hint at such a thing."

"That's all right," retorted Benson, "but I'd like to know what's keeping him away so long."

"Business," was the answer, "business. Don't you know that Adam is now engaged in attending to the greatest business transaction of his life?"

"No, I didn't know that."

"Well, he is and if you could only put yourself in his place you might understand his feelings—you know it's a terrible thing to have a million dollars suddenly dumped on you by a cruel relative?'

Benson was grinning from ear to ear by this time. He cocked his head on one side and looked at his friend with mock admiration.

"Say, Pinky, if I had your imagination, I'd never have to work for a living. You talk about a million dollars as though it were thirty cents, and besides how do you know that Adam has a million dollars left to him?"

"I don't," was the triumphant retort of the freckle-faced one. "I only said that to wake you up—to make you understand the meaning of a fortune. You know a fortune is a fortune no matter whether it's ten dollars or ten millions."

"See here," said Benson, "you're just getting around to the thing that was in my mind. Suppose by chance Adam did inherit enough boodle to make him rich. He might want to quit being a father to the kids around the school and go out and see the world."

"Bobby," cried Palmer, "you sure do talk as if you had wheels in your cranium. If there was only one man on earth who

couldn't be spoiled by money, Adam would be that man."

"I'm glad to hear you say it and I'll be a blame sight more so when I get a letter from Adam telling me about this pile of gold that's been wished on him."

The boys applied themselves to their studies with unusual zeal but at intervals they thought of the white-haired and white-bearded philosopher who had driven the station wagon for so many years and who had given them their first friendly hand-clasp on their arrival at Bell Haven. To their youthful minds he seemed to be more important to the success of the institution than the president of the Academy. It would be possible to get a new president without much difficulty, but a real chummy janitor — at least, one like Adam—was mighty hard to capture.

It was the day after their conversation concerning Adam that Bobby received a letter postmarked Chicago. He sought Pinky Palmer at once and the chums hurried to Benson's quarters for the purpose of reading the communication from the absent

friend. It was legibly written, but the ancient one, in his epistle, displayed a fine disregard for correct spelling and the rules of grammar. However, it was full of good humor and philosophy and in this respect as well as the other was characteristic of the man. It has been said that the writing of any boy or man, whether in the form of letter or otherwise, can be depended upon to give an insight to his character. This is usually true, although sometimes it is necessary, as the saying goes, to read between the lines in order to discover the truth. Adam's letter to his boy friend read:

> I know'd you'd be anxious to hear from me, so I'm takin' my pencil in hand to pen you these few lines. I'd have written to you before this only I didn't have nothin' to tell you. The truth is that they haven't found my uncle's estate yet. Now don't get frightened by this announcement. There is an estate, but somehow they hain't been able to put their hands on it. Uncle Dudley was the most careful man that ever lived. In fact, he was so darned careful about his property that it's goin' to take a

couple of detectives and a microscope to find it. He certainly did scrape and suffer to pile up his fortune and now I've got to scrape and suffer to locate it.

There is an old saying that if your pleasure interferes with your business, give up your business, but it was the other way about with Uncle Dudley. He never did have no pleasure, noway. One extreme's just as bad as another. I think if a man would only try to know himself, he'd have a better time in this world and brighter prospects for the next one. I'm sure Uncle Dudley never know'd himself right. If he had he'd a spent more of his money on himself and left less of it to his scalawag of a nephew.

But I s'pose I've just got to go ahead and sow my wild oats like the rest of the young fellows. But anyhow, I'm sure sorry that Uncle Dudley never got properly introduced to himself. He must have looked into the mirror often, but that only showed him the outside and it didn't do him no good just to look at his ugly old face. He never got acquainted with himself. He deceived himself and I want to tell you boys that self-deception is the worst kind of deception.

Now I ain't goin' to preach you boys a sermon, but I want you to get to know your-

selves before you're dead and gone. When you are tempted to do a mean thing, just think of the impression it's a-goin' to make on other people. I've found out a lot of things about my uncle that I wish I didn't know. But it's his fault and not mine. Think how bad you'd feel if you died and some nephew would find things about you that you'd hate to read in the newspapers.

I ain't been gold-bricked yet, although most of the people here look at me as much as to say that they know I'm a sure enough Rube. I don't like the high buildings here. They give me an awful kink in the neck trying to look at them. I just don't believe anything's good that gives a fellow a kink in the neck. Bell Haven's the place for me. It may be a village, but the folks there ain't afraid to smile at each other and that's more than you can say about the people in these big cities.

As soon as I get somethin' definite and can settle up this business, I'll let you know. I'm anxious to get home. The love of money sure is the root of all evil. Before I heard of this blame legacy I was as gay as a lark. Now I'm worried worse than a politician.

From your old friend,

ADAM.

The boys gurgled with delight as they read this letter. It was so like their old friend. The wit and wisdom of the composition appealed to Bobby so strongly that he read it aloud the second time and he drawled it out in such a realistic manner that it seemed as though Adam were standing before them and speaking in the style that was all his own. That night a few of the favored ones were summoned to Benson's room and given a glimpse of the treasured letter. Among the number was the Sleeping Beauty, who at once threw up his hands in a gesture of despair.

"It's awful!" he exclaimed," to think of fooling a fine old chap like Adam."

"Fooling him," echoed Bobby.

"Sure," was the confident reply; "some boob's been having a lark at the old man's expense. I don't believe there's any money. In fact, I don't believe there was any uncle. The whole business sounds like a fairy story anyhow."

Pinky Palmer, who had been curled up in a corner of the couch, jumped to his feet impatiently.

"Say, Forbes," he shouted, "you're the most skeptical guy I ever met in the course of my long life——"

"He's seventeen," cut in the Sleeping Beauty.

"No matter about that," retorted Pinky. "I've seen a good deal of life and I tell you the saddest thing I know is the fellow that never believes anything."

"Oh, say," protested the fat boy, "don't put it that way. I believe in Gulliver's Travels and the Arabian Nights, but it's stretching it too far to make me believe, the first time you say it, that Adam has risen from poverty to the position of a multi-millionare."

"We didn't say any such thing," commented Benson severely. "We merely said his uncle had died and left him his money."

"You gave me the impression that he had tumbled over a bag of gold," persisted Forbes.

"What's the use of talking to him?" exclaimed Palmer. "He's a cousin to the original doubting Thomas. Why, he

wouldn't buy gold dollars for fifty cents apiece. Would you, Forbes?"

"That depends," was the cautious reply. "If you were selling them I wouldn't touch them with a fifty-foot pole."

The laugh that greeted this sally was the signal for breaking up the little gathering. Benson had not risen next morning when there came a pounding at the door of his room and he heard the voice of the Sleeping Beauty crying:

"Bobby! Bobby!! Bobby!!!"

"What is it?" asked Benson, rubbing his eyes. "What in the world is the matter?"

"It's a letter. There's a letter for you down at the office."

"Say," came the indignant cry from beneath the bed clothing, "do you mean to say you've wakened me out of my sleep just to tell me there's a letter at the office? I'll punch your nose if you don't get away from that door and let me alone."

"But it's from Chicago," continued the alarmist, "and I think it's from Adam."

"Oh," murmured Benson, mollified at

this information, "I'll get up and see what it's all about."

He dressed hastily, all the while wondering why Adam should have sent a second letter so fast on the heels of the first. It seemed strange and he could not understand it. The Sleeping Beauty, in the meantime, paced up and down the hallway. This got on Benson's nerves to such an extent that he cried:

"If you don't get away from there I'll throw the pitcher over the transom."

"Throw away," was the cheerful response.

"Say, old fellow," pleaded Bobby, "won't you please let me alone? I'll meet you at the office as soon as I get dressed."

Forbes complied with his friend's request and in a little while Bobby finished his toilet and joined the Sleeping Beauty. The letter was from Adam and the two boys read it together with wondering eyes. It began without any preliminaries:

> This is not a new letter. It is just a postscript to the one I sent you a few hours ago. Well, I'm a heir-at-law. They've found

the money, and where do you suppose they found it? In the pages of books that stood on the shelves in the sitting room, and behind pictures of George and Martha Washington. After this I'm goin' to be a strong believer in art and literature. The biggest pile of bank notes was stuck behind the portrait of George Washington. George was the father of his country and he has been a father to me all right. Wasn't Uncle Dudley the crafty old boy? He wanted to put his hard-earned cash in a safe place. And he did. He wasn't goin' to put it in no bank to bust. This thing is a lesson in persistence, boys. Never give up if there's a fortune waiting for you somewhere. But you've got to go after it. You've got to hunt and you've got to work. It usually comes by the sweat of your brow, even if it is hid behind a picture or between the covers of a book. As soon as we get things fixed up I'll be back to Bell Haven.

Yours old friend,

ADAM.

Benson and Forbes stood looking at one another for a long time after reading the curious letter. It was Bobby who broke the silence.

"Well," he said, "what have you got to say?"

"Nothing, except that I believe in Adam's fortune now. I'm not going to doubt so much in the future. But say, Benson, the story of the money behind the pictures is mighty queer, isn't it?"

"Mighty queer," agreed Benson, "but mighty human. You'll find lots of things hard to understand as you go through this world."

And with this sage reflection Bobby started to find Pinky Palmer to let him know the contents of the wonderful letter.

CHAPTER IV

BUILDING THE CAGE

ONE day followed another in swift succession at Bell Haven, and a majority of the boys found themselves dividing their interest pretty evenly between sports and studies. This division did not please Dr. Maury, and he made it plain that lessons must have the first place in their minds unless they wished him to shut down on the games altogether. A word to the wise in this case proved to be sufficient, and the pupils applied themselves to their real work in a manner that satisfied their principal. He was wise and just, however, and was willing that they should devote a reasonable time to manly sports and to the proper development of their bodies. In the course of a few weeks an adjustment was reached by which three-fourths of their waking hours was given to

books and the remainder to play and recreation.

Naturally, the chief interest in sports was given to basketball. Baseball and rowing were not neglected, but basketball, being somewhat of a novelty, claimed a great deal of attention. Latin and Greek were included among the studies of the third year at school, and after struggling for several hours with Cicero's letters and exercises based upon the five books of Cæsar, they were only too glad to clear the cobwebs in their brains by a few rounds of vigorous work in the gymnasium. Habit has a great deal to do with the formation of character, and they soon learned that a judicious mixture of work and play helped them with both sports and studies. Bobby Benson, Pinky Palmer and the Sleeping Beauty practiced almost every day and it was not very long before they became very proficient in basketball. It was while they were working in the gymnasium one day in early October that Mike Murray sauntered into the building.

"Boys," he said, "I think the time has

arrived when you should get down to regular team work, and the first thing you should do is to arrange a series of games with other preparatory schools in this section of the country."

"That suits me to the ground," replied Benson, "and I'd like to know how to go about it."

"It's simple enough," replied the trainer. "All you've got to do is to issue a call for the meeting of the representatives of the schools you want in your league. But whatever you do should be done at once."

"We'll have to make the first move—is that the idea?"

"Somebody's got to make the first move," chuckled Murray, "and why not Bell Haven?"

So it came to pass that six boys, representing the preparatory schools within a radius of sixty miles, sat in solemn conclave and prepared a set of rules and regulations for the guidance of the Middle States Interscholastic Basketball League. Bobby Benson presided and spoke for the Bell Haven Academy. Ranged about him were boys

who acted as delegates for Cleverly, Burlingham, Grantville, Ravenroyd and Williams.

There was some difference of opinion concerning the desirability of having a cage for each of the teams. Bobby thought that such an enclosure was most important.

"But," protested Lee Carmen, who spoke for the Cleverly Academy, "I have the collegiate basketball rules here and they say distinctly that the playing surface shall be a court, free from obstructions of any kind."

"That's true enough," replied Benson, "but that rule was made for the big universities and certain of the more important colleges. Lots of preparatory schools and high schools have the cage."

"Do you think it's a good thing?"

"Sure—it keeps the game close and I'm positive it adds to the excitement."

A majority agreed with Bobby, so that the idea of a cage was finally incorporated in the regulations. It was decided that the first game of the season should be played at Bell Haven on the following Saturday.

"But," queried Carmen of Cleverly when

this part of the program was first broached, "you haven't any cage at Bell Haven."

"No, we haven't," admitted Bobby.

"How long will it take you to get one?"

"Not very long."

"But," protested the Cleverly man, "you can't get it in four days."

"If we don't, I'll eat my shirt," volunteered Bobby.

On the strength of this amazing promise, it was agreed that the opening game of the Middle States Interscholastic Basketball League should be staged at Bell Haven on the following Saturday.

"I hope your shirt is nice and tender," teased Lee Carmen as they separated, "for you'll never in the world get the cage ready in that time for the game."

"You just wait," retorted Bobby, pressing his lips together with determination, "and we'll show you how we do things at Bell Haven."

That night Benson presented the case to Pinky Palmer and a gathering of the boys in his room. He repeated what Carmen had said and assured his chums that the doubt

of their ability to build a cage in four days was a challenge from the head of the opposing team.

"Fellows," he concluded, "it's up to us to call that guy's bluff. He's as full of conceit as an egg is of meat and we're the boys to take it out of him."

"We'll do it," cried Pinky Palmer, doubling up his fist in mock anger.

"He wants us to have the court in perfect condition when the Cleverly team comes here," continued Bobby, "and he wants——"

"Oh, never mind his wants and don't wants," interrupted Palmer. "We'll be ready for that bunch when they reach Bell Haven."

"If words were deeds, Pinky," drawled Gordon Greely "you'd have the championship cinched without leaving this room."

Palmer flushed to the roots of his hair at this taunt and clenched his fist in his pocket. But the sudden gust of anger passed as quickly as it had come and he said lightly:

"Well, what has Mr. Wiseman got to suggest?"

"Nothing, except that we go ahead with this cage business instead of talking about it. It will take every hour we've got to spare, and if we sit here talking we're sure to fall down."

"There's something in what the big fellow says," admitted Bobby Benson. "How much have we in the athletic treasury?"

"Just $47.50," replied Nelson James, who was the treasurer of the fund.

A groan of despair went the round of the little circle.

"That's only a flea bite," commented Bobby.

"What do you suppose it would take to build a cage?" asked Greely.

"We might get it done for two hundred dollars if we interested our old friend, Michael Morrison, in the matter," said Benson.

"But we haven't got the two hundred," taunted Greely.

"And we can't possibly get it in four days," supplemented James.

"Not unless we rob a bank," suggested the irrepressible Palmer.

This flash of wit did not even evoke a smile. The boys sat as still as graven images. They were confronted with a condition and not a theory and they were at a loss how to meet it. Given ample time they could have devised some method of raising the money. But they did not have the time. Even the possibility of begging a loan from some kind friend was out of the question. General James had come to their rescue in equipping their boat house, but they were too high spirited to go to him hat-in-hand for the basketball team.

The thought of having to confess failure to the Cleverly crowd was unbearable. Bobby Benson, for the first time, felt abashed at the boast he had made to Lee Carmen. If it had not been for that, they might have managed the affair nicely in three or four weeks. Not to make good would be to humiliate every boy at Bell Haven. It was a lesson not to speak until the consequences had been counted. But all of this moralizing did no good. So

they sat there looking at one another like the mourners at a funeral. In the midst of the gloom Bobby jumped to his feet with a shout of triumph.

"I've got it!" he cried. "I've got it!!"

"What is it?" chorused the others.

"We'll build the cage ourselves," he exclaimed. "All we need is some wood and wire and a lot of willing hands."

"Will you kindly explain yourself?" asked Gordon Greely in his calm, self-contained manner.

"It's as easy as sliding down a greased pole," rejoined Bobby. "We've got enough cash on hand to buy the material, and all we need after that is some hammers and saws and nails and a bunch of willing hearts and hands."

"I like the way you dope it out," grinned Pinky Palmer. "You talk as if this was mere pastime. A cage may be a cage, but the thing you fellows put together is likely to be an object fit to put on exhibition at a dime museum."

"Say," exclaimed Benson, suddenly turn-

ing on his companion, "you go on like the star mourner at a wake. There isn't anything terrible about this business. All it takes is a little gumption and common sense. I'll undertake to supply the gumption if you fellows will only give me a faint glimmering of reason."

"Did you ever build a cage before?" queried Nelson James.

"No," was the prompt reply, "but I know a man that has built one."

"Who is that?"

"Michael Morrison."

"The contractor that erected our boat house?" commented Pinky.

"The very same," admitted Benson.

"But say," interjected James, "you don't expect him to build us a cage on tick, do you?"

"I don't expect him to build us a cage on anything," mimicked Bobby, "but I do expect him to give us a few pointers to keep us from going astray. And he'll do it too, or I'm badly fooled in my man. If you fellows are willing, I'll go right away and explain the whole business to him and have

him tell us where to get the lumber and wire and how to start the contrivance."

"Of course we're willing," consented Pinky, "but why in the Old Nick didn't you tell us that you had this trick up your sleeve? Why did you keep us all guessing over what we were going to do?"

"I didn't know it myself till a minute ago," was the frank response, "and as for the details, they've been unfolding themselves as we talked the business over."

"Do you believe that, fellows?" asked Pinky, turning to the others with an air of skepticism.

The first step for the rush movement for the building of the cage was to get the approval of the president of the Academy. Dr. Maury smiled benignly at the three boys who had appointed themselves a committee to explain the situation to him.

"You say you have the money for the material?" he asked after they had presented the case.

"Yes, sir," replied Bobby Benson, "we're sure of that."

"And you're willing to take the cage out

of the gymnasium whenever it may seem desirable?"

"Oh, yes," agreed Benson, who was willing to promise anything.

"All right," conceded Dr. Maury, consciously, or otherwise, dropping into the lingo of the day, "go ahead—go as far as you like."

With the president's approval secured, the next move was to visit Michael Morrison the contractor and builder. He was heartily glad to see them and he listened to their story with sympathetic interest.

"How much money have you got?"

"Exactly $47.50," spoke up Nelson James, who was nicknamed the "Bearer of the Golden Fleece."

The builder laughed until his cheeks became red and the tears began to trickle from his eyes.

"Won't that be enough?" asked Benson anxiously.

"Sure," he replied, resuming his gravity. "I was just thinking how easily you could spend all you've got on little extras."

"But really," persisted Bobby, "can't

we pull through with it if we do the work?"

"Yes," was the reassuring reply, "the labor is the big item of expense in a job of this kind. The only other thing is to get your material right and I'll see to that for you."

And he did "see to it" with a thoroughness and sincerity that proved his kindness of heart and his deep interest in the boys of Bell Haven.

First of all he directed them to a dealer in building material who was able to furnish them with second-hand posts that were quite as good as new, and only cost half the usual price. After that he sent the youngsters to a wire manufacturer who furnished them with the necessary screening at wholesale rates. Finally the big baskets for either side of the court and the other paraphernalia were purchased from a sporting goods dealer.

Within twenty-four hours the material had been delivered and a dozen boys were hard at work in the gymnasium. The sound of hammer and saw rang through the

huge apartment and the energy and enthusiasm which the youngsters put in their work would have reflected credit on skilled mechanics. Michael Morrison not only advised them concerning the purchase of the material, but sent one of his foremen to the Academy to see that the building was done in an orderly and intelligent manner.

"I'm afraid we won't have anything left to pay you," said Bobby Benson fearfully.

The man smiled.

"Sure, it would be worth me job if I took as much as a red cent from you," he replied. "I've been donated for the day for the good of the cause."

The only pause was at noon for lunch, but the "whistle blew" in half an hour, as Pinky Palmer humorously put it, and work was resumed with a will. It proceeded without interruption until the sun went down. The cage was fully completed by that time, and the willing workers were very happy. Benson voiced the general sentiment, as viewing the work, he said:

"Boys, you never really know what you can do until you try it."

CHAPTER V

ADAM RECEIVES ADVICE

TWILIGHT was melting into darkness the next evening when Bobby Benson heard a cluck, followed by the familiar "Gid-up" and he knew at once that Adam had returned from his trip to Chicago. He hurried out on the campus of the Bell Haven Academy just in time to see Maud S. and the old Germantown wagon coming along the graveled road-way. The venerable driver and the boy caught sight of one another almost at the same moment, and Adam, tossing the reins on the back of the mare, jumped to the ground and embraced Benson in a bear-like hug.

"Son, I'm mighty glad to see you," he said, stroking his long, white beard and gazing at the boy with an affection with which a father might greet a long-lost son.

"You haven't got anything on me," chirped Bobby. "I have just begun to get

homesick for a look at your white hair and your smiling countenance."

"Well, well," remarked the janitor with his long-drawn-out drawl, "how the boy does go on, to be sure."

"I'll wait until you get the horse unharnessed and put away," suggested Benson, "and after that I'll come over to see you at your rooms."

"That'll jist suit me to a T," was the quick agreement.

But while Adam was speaking, Benson's eyes took on a look of perplexity and disappointment.

"I forgot that you had to get something to eat," he said ruefully, "and I suppose I'll have to postpone my visit until later in the night."

"You jist won't do any sich thing. I kin talk an' eat at the same time an' I've got enough to tell you to fill fifty-seven story books."

It was scarcely an hour later when Benson made his way to Mrs. Bowen's boarding house. He was not alone. The other boys had learned of the return of their favorite

and Bobby was followed by Pinky Palmer, Gordon Greely, Nelson James and the Sleeping Beauty. They found Adam seated at the dining-room table, making serious inroads on an appetizing chicken pie, while the landlady sat nearby with her hands in her lap and looked approvingly at the evident enjoyment of her venerable boarder.

"Hello, boys," called the old man, reaching out and greeting them with a disengaged hand while he continued to eat with the other. "I'm mighty glad to see you, but I'm respondin' to nature's demands jist now and it would be a sin to interrupt such a pious proceedin'."

"You're perfectly right," chuckled Pinky Palmer, "and I'm only sorry I'm not in on that fragrant sample of Mrs. Bowen's cooking."

"Oh, dear me!" exclaimed the person in question, "I never thought that you boys might be hungry. I'll go and get you something."

"Not at all," laughed Pinky rising and placing a detaining hand on her arm. "I

was only joking. We just had our supper over at the Academy."

"Well, Adam," said Bobby, "tell us all about your trip—and your fortune if there is any."

"Oh, there is a fortune, all right," nodded the old man as he grasped a leg of the chicken in his two hands in order to make a clean job of the business, "but it is not as large as I expected. After all the bills were paid and the red tape attended to, I found that I had exactly $1200 to bring back with me to Bell Haven."

"It's not very much," exclaimed Nelson James with a tinge of disappointment in his voice.

"No," said Adam as he reached for another helping of the chicken pie, "it's not so awful much: as the chap in the play says, 'It's not as deep as a well or as wide as a barn door,' but it'll do, all right, it'll do."

By this time the venerable man of all-work of the Academy had satisfied his appetite and at his invitation all of the boys went to his room, where the old man after

lighting his corn-cob pipe proceeded to give them a vivid story of the adventures that had befallen him during his stay in Chicago. He was quaint and original in his description of life in a big city and he kept the boys laughing during all the time he was talking.

"I had my own time gittin' things straightened out," he remarked. "They say that honesty is the best policy, but you kin never git some people to take out that kind of a policy."

"I suppose," interjected Pinky Palmer, "that you didn't have much trouble after you made them understand your business."

Adam shook his head skeptically.

"I wouldn't say that," he remarked. "I wasted a lot of good wind on some of those fellows. Talkin' to some men, you know, is just like tryin' to swim in shallow water."

At this point in the janitor's discourse there was a knock at the door and Dr. Maury, the president of the Academy, walked into the room with outstretched hand.

"I'm mighty glad to see you back again,

my old friend, and I want to congratulate you on your good fortune."

The janitor, who was filled with confusion at the unexpected honor of a visit from the head of the institution, said in a half apologetic tone:

"It's not much of a fortune. It's only $1200."

Dr. Maury nodded.

"It is all right, no matter how much it amounts to, but if I were you, Adam, I'd invest it in some good bond. It will be perfectly safe then and you wouldn't have to worry over the possibility of losing it."

The principal of the Academy had scarcely left the room when Tiberius Brown made his appearance and greeted the old man with a sincerity that was not to be denied.

"I've heard of your unexpected windfall and if you will not take it amiss, I would advise you to put it in the Savings Fund."

A chorus of laughter greeted this remark and Tiberius lifted his eyebrows in surprise.

"I was not aware," he retorted in his most oratorical style, "that I had made any humorous remark."

"You haven't," quickly reassured Bobby Benson, "but everybody seems to be bent on giving Adam good advice tonight."

The sound of laughter brought Mrs. Bowen, the landlady, to the room and as soon as she got the trend of the conversation, she remarked with feminine sagacity:

"I'm not much of a one to advise people with what to do with their money, but if Mr. West cares to know my views, I'd think it would be a good investment if he'd spend part of his fortune in refurnishing this room."

Adam smiled and stroked his white beard and looked about the room with meditative eyes.

"It looks pretty good to me," he drolled finally. "I'm not gittin' proud even if I have a little ready cash."

Bobby followed the eyes of his venerable friend as he glanced at the furniture in the room and he could not help but think that the three black, horse-hair chairs had seen their best days. They were becoming threadbare and worn out and before long would have to be replaced, but a gleam of

mischief came into his big brown eyes as he remarked:

"I hope that Adam won't be foolish enough to spend his money on clothes and furniture. What he should do is to get a nifty little automobile."

Adam shook his head protestingly.

"I'm gittin' too old for any nonsense of that kind. Let the young fellows do the joy ridin.' Them is my sentiments."

"Well," said Bobby as if he were weighing the subject carefully, "there are two sides to the question——"

"Yes," interrupted the old man, "there are always two sides to any question—the wrong side and your side."

"See here," chimed in Pinky Palmer at this stage of the conversation, "I think that Adam should do just as he pleases with the money. It's his money and he ought to have the pleasure of putting it just where he pleases."

It was getting late by this time and as the boys rose to go Adam placed his great big horny hand on Palmer's red head and said in a low voice:

"I know jist what I'm goin' to do with this money. I counted over them twelve one-hundred-dollar bills a dozen times on my way from Chicago and I made up my mind jist exactly how I was a-goin' to dispose of them."

"How?" asked Pinky.

For answer, Adam gave the boy a hearty slap between the shoulder blades and exclaimed gleefully:

"That's my secret and I ain't a-goin' to give it away to nobody."

CHAPTER VI

THE DASH TO VICTORY

IT was a bright Saturday afternoon when the Bell Haven and Cleverly basketball teams met for the purpose of playing the first championship game of the season. Rows of stands had been built around the cage in the gymnasium and that portion of the hall presented the appearance of an amphitheater with the spectators looking down on the players.

The place was filled to its capacity. The game was scheduled to take place at two o'clock, but long before that time the basketball fans began to gather at the hall and in a short while every seat was filled and standing room in the aisles was at a premium. Nearly every pupil of the Bell Haven Academy was present for the purpose of rooting for the favorites. The Cleverly

players came to town in a special car and brought with them a large delegation of enthusiastic admirers.

Everybody, in the boyish vernacular of the occasion, "stood on their toes," and when the whistle blew for the first half of the game the spectators were already wrought up to a high pitch of excitement. Dr. Maury was present and on either side of him were seated Tiberius Brown and Adam West. The Bell Haven players trotted into the enclosure first and they were received with an outburst of enthusiastic applause. The boys were in the pink of condition and like war horses seemed to scent the battle from afar. They wore blue jerseys, the fronts of which were ornamented with the bright red initials B. H. White trunks, striped stockings and rubber-soled shoes completed their attire. The Cleverly boys were dressed very much like their competitors, except that they wore white sleeveless jerseys with the big blue letter C on the breast of the garment. The lineup of the two teams was as follows:

Bell Haven		Cleverly
Palmer.....	right forward	.....Wood
Greely.....	left forward	.....Smith
Benson (capt.) .	center	...Carmen (capt.)
Forbes.....	right guard	.....Kent
James.....	left guard.	.....Jasper

The game started with a rush and Adam West, who was one of the most ardent of the Bell Haven rooters, declared that Cleverly would never have a chance from the time the ball was first tossed until the whistle blew for the final play. Tiberius Brown, hearing this declaration, turned to the white-bearded janitor and said in a tone of severity:

"Adam, that is not a very courteous attitude for a member of the Bell Haven Academy to take towards the opposing team."

"Courtesy be hanged," exclaimed the aged one. "You don't suppose that I came here to root for the other side, do you?"

"Not at all," assured the teacher in his most approved, oratorical style, "but it strikes me that it is scarcely——"

"It strikes me," interjected the janitor, "that if you don't stop talkin' and keep your eye on the cage, you're goin' to miss some pretty basketball."

And so it seemed. The referee had tossed the ball in the air and Bobby Benson, making a flying leap, got the jump on the Cleverly center. With a well-directed blow he sent the sphere into the waiting hands of Pinky Palmer. With trained precision the red-haired one quickly passed it on to the Sleeping Beauty. At this moment he thoroughly belied his nickname. His eyes flashed with the excitement of the play and the nerves in his body seemed to be quivering in unison with the shouts and yells of the spectators. Successfully dodging Jasper, the left guard of the Cleverly team who tried to grab the ball, Forbes rushed to the center of the court and firmly planting both feet on the floor whirled the ball in the direction of the basket. A shout went up from the crowd that could have been heard a block away, but the next moment it died to a groan of despair, and no wonder, for the ball, after circling about

the rim of the basket, unexpectedly turned and fell to the floor.

The Cleverly players took fresh courage at this mishap to their opponents. Jasper made a sudden rush and before the Bell Haven boys could prevent it had grabbed the ball and was making for the other end of the court. He tossed it to Wood, the right forward, who in turn snapped it to Lee Carmen, the captain of the Cleverly team, who, taking aim, shot it squarely into the basket. The audience was a partisan one, but they were inclined to give the opposition a fair show, and when the captain of the rival team made this brilliant play there was a burst of applause and several rounds of vigorous hand-clapping.

Carmen was stimulated by this unexpected encouragement and played with all the vigor and earnestness of a boy who feels that he is fighting against odds. The result was remarkable. Carmen was opposed to Benson and followed up his advantage with such swiftness and shrewdness that he sent the ball through the net four different times, Benson being out-generaled and

unable to stop him. Carmen was known to his associates as the "blind dribbler" and in making one of his mad dashes up the floor, went into the side of the cage and cut his head. It so happened that the whistle had just been blown to announce the conclusion of the first half. Carmen was taken into the dressing room and a physician who was fortunately present, put a stitch into the wound and otherwise patched him up so that he might finish the game. The other boys of the Cleverly team wanted him to quit and to substitute another player for center, but the plucky captain refused and said that he proposed to finish the game if it was the last act of his life.

The score at the conclusion of the first half was very one-sided, standing 14 to 0 in favor of the Cleverly players. Everybody loves a winner and few persons care for a loser, and as a consequence of this the ardor of some of the Bell Haven rooters was very much diminished. One of them even went so far as to jeer at the home team as they left the cage for the short intermis-

sion allowed by the rules. The Sleeping Beauty, who happened to be near the jeering spectator, lost his temper and cried out:

"You'd better go down to the mill pond and soak your head."

"You'd better get a head to soak," was the quick retort. "You haven't enough brains to get in out of the wet. You're a fat-head and a bone-head and a solid piece of ivory, all melted into one."

This outburst of picturesque slang instantly restored Forbes to his natural self. He burst out laughing and as he moved away, exclaimed:

"I guess you're right, old top. I'll try to redeem myself in the next half of the game."

A soft answer is said to turn away wrath. It certainly had a soothing effect in this particular instance. The excited spectator was so surprised at the unexpected good humor of the Sleeping Beauty that he became almost speechless. He recovered quickly, however, and called in a tone of conciliation:

"Hey, bo, I want to take back all that I said to you. I didn't mean it, anyway. I was just a little bit excited."

But the object of his remarks had already left the cage and was entering the dressing room. Forbes found the other players sprawling about the apartment and resting for the final test. The rubber was at work on Bobby Benson and between grips of the powerful fingers the youthful captain was trying to instil a fighting spirit into the members of the team.

"Fellows," he cried, "unless you pitch in and redeem yourselves in the next twenty minutes, we may as well quit basketball and play marbles. Haven't you got any spunk at all? Are you going to let that bunch of hayseeds from Cleverly use you for door-mats? If not, now is the time to speak or forever after hold your peace. Go in as if you wanted to win. Don't be afraid of getting hurt. We're not delegates of a peace convention. We've got to scrap like forty unless we want to be thrown on the scrap heap. Take your choice of scrap or scrap heap. Why, some of you behaved

like Quakers—just as if you had conscientious scruples against fighting."

The talk had just the effect that Bobby intended. Most of the boys were resentful and showed it by their words and looks.

"Say, Benson," cried Forbes, "you're so full of conceit that it's oozing out of the pores of your skin."

Benson laughed.

"Unless you wake up and get to work in that cage, nothing will ooze out of the pores of your skin."

A young man rushed into the room at this point to announce that it was time to start the second half of the proceedings and as the members of the team filed into the cage for the final round, they were as aggressive as so many bantam roosters. The spectators by this time were in a more amiable mood and greeted the home players with a friendly shout of approval. The whistle blew and the referee tossed the ball in the air. Benson was the first to reach it and with a quick turn of the wrist, hurled it in the direction of Gordon Greely. Gordon

passed it to James, and the little fellow getting in line with the basket, made a throw that sent the ball through the net. It was the first goal and from that moment the Bell Haven boys played with the determination of an unbeatable team. Field goals by Greely and Palmer followed in quick succession. After that Benson starred in a manner that brought shout after shout of approval from the frenzied fans outside of the cage.

Bobby kept at his work with an energy that might have been worthy of a better cause. He paid no attention to the rooters, but kept his eye glued on the ball all the time. He was dribbling down the floor when Carmen, purposely or otherwise, tripped him pretty hard, and it was only the interference of the other players that prevented trouble. The Sleeping Beauty played a splendid game for the Bell Haven boys, blocking a number of passes made by the Cleverly players. On a number of other occasions the Cleverlyites had the opportunity for scoring, but the shots were either very wide of the mark or were

thrown feebly at the basket. Goal after goal was made on the other hand by Benson, Palmer and Greely, and this continued until the Bell Haven team took a lead that made the score stand 27 to 14.

As the time for the game was drawing to a close, the Cleverly boys played desperately to prevent the Bell Haven team from scoring any more goals and gradually the play became rougher and rougher. It was just as the whistle blew that Jasper of the Cleverly team put out his foot and tripped Bobby Benson.

Most of the spectators detected the foul and cries of "Foul! Foul!!" went up from different parts of the room. As the players made their way towards the gate, the crowd rushed down on the floor and one of the spectators drew back his arm and struck at Jasper. The Cleverly man dodged the blow and retreated into the cage. Instantly a dozen persons crowded into the enclosure and started after the offending player. It was a critical moment. There was no doubt that Jasper would have been roughly handled, but just as the

infuriated fans reached him Bobby Benson came to the rescue.

"Hands off!" he yelled at the top of his voice.

This unexpected interference stunned the miniature mob. They halted instinctively and the brief pause gave Bobby a chance to get between the mob and Jasper, who was down on his hands and knees, cringing in a corner of the cage.

"What's the matter with you boobs," cried Bobby, his face flushed with anger and excitement. "Do you think it's a square deal for fifteen fellows to jump on one?"

"Aw, what's the matter with you?" growled one tough-looking specimen of Young America, "didn't the guy put out his foot and trip you? You needn't get sore. He played you a dirty trick."

"Maybe he did," said the victorious captain, "but I want you to understand that I'm perfectly able to take care of myself and when I need your help, I'll call for it."

"We won the game, all right, didn't we?" exclaimed the spokesman, suddenly for-

getting his anger and smiling at the remembrance of the victory.

"You bet we did," was the cheerful response, "and we're going to win more before the season's over."

After that each member of the attacking party had to shake hands with the captain of the Bell Haven team and after they had left the cage, Benson helped Jasper to reach the dressing room in safety.

CHAPTER VII

FORBES TAKES A DARE

FOR a week after the basketball game, nothing else was talked about except the remarkable finish of the Bell Haven team. It had a good effect upon the boys generally, for they realized the importance of tenacity in sports as well as in the other affairs of life. The members of the team felt elated because they had accomplished the difficult task of overcoming a big lead.

"If I do say it myself," said Forbes, lying back on the couch in Bobby Benson's room, "it proves that we've got sand, and a team that's got sand is sure to get away with the trick."

"I don't know about sand," remarked Nelson James in his quiet, unassuming way. "I should say that we had plenty of bulldog grit. I think——"

"Say, you fellows," interrupted Pinky

Palmer, running his long fingers through his red hair, "what do you call this, anyhow? It sounds like a mutual admiration society. You have been seated here for the last five minutes throwing bouquets at each other. It's fierce, fellows. Cut it out."

"Well," said Benson reflectively, "there's nothing like having a good opinion of yourself and maybe if we didn't throw bouquets at one another, we mightn't get anybody else to do it."

"Don't count your chickens before they're hatched," said Gordon Greely, breaking into the conversation at this point. "Everybody is willing to hand you a few bouquets just now, but maybe before the season's over they'll be throwing brick-bats at all of us."

After that the discussion turned to the question of the next basketball game. It was announced that Burlingham would play the second game of the season at Bell Haven on the following Saturday. Captain Benson said that he knew the players on the Burlingham team and was fairly well

acquainted with their method of offense and defense.

"However," he added, "I think it will be a good thing to get up a new set of signals for that game. The oftener we change the signals, the better it will be for us and the worse it will be for the other fellows."

"I think we're all right with the exception of the Sleeping Beauty," said Pinky Palmer jestingly. "I believe that he ought to take some exercise to work off a few pounds of that surplus fat."

"I take as much exercise as any of you ginks," was the indignant retort.

"Yes," persisted the playful Pinky, "but you don't take the right kind. The things you do only add to your weight. What you want to do is to reduce it. I suggest that you go swimming two or three times a week."

"That's cruel," said Gordon Greely. "You fellows know very well that Forbes doesn't know how to swim."

"I can outswim any fellow in the room," was the hot retort.

"Oh, now, what's the use of talking that way," exclaimed Palmer, adding fuel to the flames. "You know that you'd go right to the bottom if you ever got into the water."

"He didn't go to the bottom when he helped Bell Haven to win the boat race last year," exclaimed Benson, loyally coming to his friend's rescue.

The Sleeping Beauty flashed a message of gratitude to the young captain, but remained silent in the face of this hearty praise.

"All the same," persisted Palmer, returning to the attack, "this big lobster couldn't stay in the water any length of time."

"You'd better quit, Palmer," said James gently. "You know you're just trying to get Forbes' goat."

There was silence for a moment after that and presently the Sleeping Beauty rose from the couch and walking over to the tormentor, shook his finger under his nose and said with grim deliberation:

"I'll tell you what I'll do, you red-headed bluffer. I'll swim you a race from Cleverly to Burlingham and back again. It's a

distance of about twelve miles altogether and I'll agree that the loser shall buy the dinners for the basketball team on the next free day we have."

The other boys were on their feet the moment they realized the significance of the challenge. They applauded vigorously and Bobby Benson slapped Forbes on the back with such violence that the big fellow was seized with a fit of coughing that threatened to strangle him.

"Oh, I guess you know how to swim," confessed Palmer a little ruefully, "and I'm willing to let it go at that."

But Forbes' ire was fully aroused by this time and he did not propose to let his tormentor off so easily.

"No you won't!" he shouted; "you won't let it go at that. You have either got to put up or shut up," and he glared at the red-haired one with a gaze that could not be answered.

"All right," said Pinky finally, "when will we have the race?"

"Tomorrow," said the Sleeping Beauty promptly.

"My," said Pinky, looking at his friend quizzically, "but you are in a hurry, aren't you?"

"Not specially," was the calm response, "only the sooner it's over, the better it will be for the both of us. I've got my studies to look after."

This reference to the serious part of life at Bell Haven caused a general laugh, which restored good humor to both of the boys. However, before they had parted for the night all of the details of the swimming contest between Pinky Palmer and the Sleeping Beauty had been arranged.

The next day was ushered in with an overcast sky. A fog which was thick and disagreeable hung over the river like a great cloak. The boys were disappointed because weather of this kind was likely to rob the race of its charm. However, shortly before noon the sun came out in all its glory and the mist dispelled as if by magic. It was a holiday at Bell Haven and the news of the improvised race had spread rapidly about the Academy grounds. As a result of this there were quite a number of

the boys awaiting the event, and when two o'clock arrived, the river bank was fairly crowded with spectators. Nelson James volunteered to act as starter and referee. He brought a small revolver with him and it was agreed that the moment he fired into the air, the two contestants should dive off the wharf and start on their way to Burlingham.

Promptly on the moment the rival swimmers appeared, bare-footed, bare-headed and enveloped in great raincoats. They threw off their coverings simultaneously and at sight of them in their racing suits the other boys broke out into shouts of laughter and applause. The Sleeping Beauty in a spirit of fun had put on a suit of bright green, while Palmer's was of vivid red, which his opponent declared was for the purpose of harmonizing with the color of his hair. They stood side by side at the edge of the wharf and Nelson James, with his pistol in mid-air, called out:

"Are you ready?"

"Ready!" came the response as one word from the two young throats.

"Then go!" shouted the starter as he pulled the trigger and the shot rang out over the peaceful river.

Almost at the same moment the two boys sprang from the wharf. Their bodies were in the air for a moment and the next instant they had plunged into the water. There was a cheer from the crowd and the race began. Both contestants showed themselves to be thoroughly at ease in the water. The Sleeping Beauty used an easy overhand, side stroke, and Pinky Palmer adopted the double over-arm. Starter James had secured an electric runabout for the occasion and Bobby Benson and Gordon Greely piled into the vehicle with him. The machine started off slowly, simply going at a pace sufficient to keep up with the men in the water. Ordinarily a pilot boat is used in affairs of this kind, but the river was so straight at this point that it was not deemed necessary to keep close to the swimmers.

At the start, Forbes and Palmer kept within a few feet of each other. The red-haired one apparently moved along easier

than his heavier opponent, but when one-half of the journey was completed, it was found that the boys were still within a yard of one another. At the turning point in Burlingham, both of them were compelled to tread water and swim slowly against the stream. Five minutes later, after they were fairly on their way on the return trip, the Sleeping Beauty was seen to gradually but steadily forge ahead, increasing the lead at one time during the race so that a hundred yards separated the pair. As they neared the end of the long grind, however, Palmer, by what looked to be superior generalship on his part, cut this lead down to twenty-five yards and it seemed as if the auburn-haired one would overhaul his competitor and win the race. Indeed, as they came within sight of the Bell Haven wharf they were swimming neck and neck.

The crowd along the river bank, which had followed every inch of the race with the closest attention, was now larger and noisier than ever.

"Go it, Pinky, old boy," shouted a

group of Palmer's adherents; "go to it and show the fat one what you can do!"

"Keep up your courage, Forbsey," came from a cluster of the stout boy's friends; "don't let that shrimp get the best of you!"

Neither of the swimmers paid any attention to the shouts of the spectators, but kept their minds on the work that lay before them. Just when they were within seven or eight yards of the goal, Forbes, changing to the fast crawl stroke for the spurt, shot ahead of his opponent. Palmer attempted to regain what he had lost, but in vain. The Sleeping Beauty never slowed for a second and in almost less time than it takes to tell it had touched the end of the wharf with the tips of his fingers and won the match.

A half dozen pairs of willing hands reached down and pulled him out of the water. The moment he touched the top of the wharf, the boys raised him on the top of their shoulders and carried him, dripping, to the club house.

Pinky Palmer followed slowly, but in the best of good humor. Bobby Benson,

who stayed behind to give his friend a hand, slapped him on the shoulder affectionately.

"Somebody had to win, old boy," he said, "and you'll have the satisfaction of buying the dinners for the crowd."

Palmer smiled as he squeezed the water out of his red racing suit.

"Don't let that worry you, Bobby," he said cheerfully. "I'm perfectly willing to stand treat and I'm not half sorry to see the big fellow win. I teased him into the match anyhow. I've made a hero out of him and for the next ten days at least it can't be said that nobody loves a fat man."

CHAPTER VIII

PINKY PALMER'S REMORSE

ON the morning after the swimming match, Tiberius Brown took his usual seat in the school room and slowly glanced around at the members of his class. He seemed to be puzzled. He scratched his head with the edge of his ruler in his characteristic, absent-minded way and wondered what was lacking in the ordinary routine of the day. His books and papers were in position and the boys, strange to say, were quiet and attentive. Suddenly the thing dawned upon him. There was an absentee and it was none other than John Forbes, otherwise known to fame as the Sleeping Beauty.

Forbes had a habit of oversleeping himself and this was naturally the first reason that Tiberius assigned for the non-appearance of the stout one. He arose and smoothing the folds of his tight-fitting

black frock coat, nervously rapped on the desk for attention. When he spoke it was in his high, shrill, falsetto voice. He swung his long arm into the air and pointing an accusing finger in the direction of Pinky Palmer, he called out:

"Palmer, stand up."

The red-haired one stood up reluctantly, and wondered what was coming.

"Do you know anything about Forbes?" asked the teacher, raising his voice to a higher pitch with each succeeding word.

"No, sir," said Pinky with unaccustomed meekness.

"Do you know why he is absent this morning?"

"I haven't the faintest idea," said Palmer, slowly recovering his courage.

"Isn't it a fact that you and Forbes were swimming in the Arlington River yesterday afternoon?"

"Yes, sir, but I don't see what that's got to do with his absence today."

"No impudence, young man," cried Tiberius with surprising sternness.

The auburn-haired one, who had no

thought of insubordination, took this unjust accusation in silence.

"Well, sir," continued the teacher, tightly compressing his lips, "suppose you go to his room and ascertain the cause of his delay in reporting for school."

Pinky, who was always glad of the chance to leave a class, promptly obeyed this order. Once outside he whistled in his joy at temporarily escaping from the discipline of the school, but by the time he reached the entrance to the dormitories, he began to wonder what was the matter with Forbes. The fat boy enjoyed the reputation—merited or otherwise—of being indolent and it was quite possible that he had overslept himself. As Palmer ascended the stairs, another thought came suddenly into his mind. Suppose something had gone wrong with his classmate? His heart sank and somehow or other his forebodings were connected with the swimming match of the day before. By this time he had reached the door of Forbes' room. Some instinct prompted him to knock at the door. This was an unusual proceeding.

Usually he dashed into the room without any ceremony.

"Come in," cried a tremulous voice from the other side of the partition. Nervously turning the handle of the door, he slowly opened it and stepped into the apartment. The Sleeping Beauty was in bed. His face was flushed and he was tossing from side to side with a high fever. Palmer reached over and put his hand on the boy's forehead and found that it was burning.

"What's the matter?" he asked anxiously.

"I don't know," replied Forbes, staring at him wildly. "I've got awful pains in the back and legs. I feel as if sixteen hundred horses were trying to pull me apart."

Pinky made an effort to treat the matter lightly.

"You're mistaken, old top," he said. "You couldn't get that many horses up this narrow stairway, and even if you got one of 'em in here you'd have to get out yourself first."

The Sleeping Beauty was in no mood for jesting. He turned over with a groan and began to kick the bed-covers to one side. Instinctively Pinky reached across and placed the quilts in shape.

"You don't want to do that," he said in a voice that trembled in spite of himself. "You know if you do you're likely to catch cold."

Something about this remark caused Forbes to burst out laughing.

"Oh, it's all right," he said. "I think this'll pass over, and if you get Tiberius to excuse me, I think I'll be able to report for school tomorrow."

"What do you think caused it?" asked the visitor.

Forbes made an effort to shrug his shoulders and failed. Then he waved his right arm in an explanatory manner.

"I guess it was that swim. I can't think of anything else. I had a chill after I went to bed last night and when I woke up this morning, I thought that two Italians were trying to cook me on a great big chestnut roaster."

Pinky laughed out of compliment to his friend, but down in his heart he felt very apprehensive.

"I think I'll go and telephone for a doctor," he said finally.

The sick boy sat up in bed.

"Now don't you do anything of the kind," he protested. "I'll be all right if you just let me alone for a few hours."

With that assurance, Palmer left the room and returned to the other building, where he made his report to Tiberius Brown. The teacher listened in silence, but presently raising his arm with the short sleeve that exposed his thin wrist, he shook it at an imaginary foe.

"It's just as I expected. It was the wildest sort of folly for you boys to go swimming in the river at this time in October. It's a wonder both of you are not laid up. I'd like to know who is responsible for such nonsense."

A flush gradually crept over Palmer's freckled face until it nearly resembled the color of his hair.

"I guess it was my fault," he finally said in stammering tones. "I dared Forbes to swim and he took my dare."

Tiberius sighed deeply and shook his head in a melancholy manner.

"I'm afraid, Palmer, that you never will get sense. However, I'll go over and see the boy and find out if he needs medical attention."

The moment he left the room all semblance of order disappeared. The boys were fond of Forbes, but not even the illness of their classmate could restrain their boyish exuberance. Spit-balls went flying around the room, and presently Gordon Greely walked up to the platform and took the teacher's seat. He rapped on the desk with a ruler and then gave an imitation of Tiberius Brown as he appeared to the pupils in his oratorical moments. Greely pulled up his coat sleeves until his wrists were exposed and then raising his arm in midair, he began to lecture the boys upon their imaginary faults. They did not let him talk very long, however, for in a few minutes he was compelled to duck

in order to dodge the shower of erasers, books and pamphlets of all sorts.

The sound of something that resembled the clinking of keys suddenly arrested the boys. Dr. Maury, the principal of the school, was in the habit of going from one room to another and his presence was invariably heralded by the rattling of a big bunch of keys which he always carried with him. The fear that he might be coming sobered the boys and they quickly returned to their desks. There was perfect silence for a while, but the Doctor did not make his appearance. Nelson James, acting as a self-appointed committee of one, left his seat and slipped out into the hallway. No one was in sight and he quickly returned and proclaimed the fact to the class. Instantly disorder reigned supreme again.

Most of the boys rushed to the open space near the teacher's desk and executed Indian dances. After that they joined hands and thrusting Pinky Palmer into the center of the ring, began to march around, singing in gleeful tones, "Here we go

round the mulberry bush." At this moment the rattling of the bunch of keys was heard above the din and confusion of the class room. For the second time there was a scampering back to their seats and every boy in the room assumed a studious expression. They looked as if butter would not melt in their mouths. Some moments of absolute silence passed, but Dr. Maury did not come into the room. While they were puzzling their brains over this strange performance, a muffled laugh was heard from behind the corner of the big blackboard.

Gordon Greely rushed over to that part of the room with a hop, skip and a jump, and reaching out he grabbed the disappearing tail of a coat. He pulled with all his might and presently Bobby Benson was hauled out laughing at the top of his voice. In his hand he held a bunch of big nails, which, when vigorously shaken, resembled the noise made by a bunch of keys.

Greely, grabbing Benson by the neck, dragged him into the center of the floor. A half dozen of the boys joined Greely,

and they were drubbing Bobby with might and main, when the door opened and Tiberius Brown entered the room.

"Take your seats," he called sternly.

They did so, looking very sheepish. The teacher arranged the papers on his desk and was about to proceed with the lesson of the day, when Pinky Palmer raised his hand timidly.

"Mr. Brown," he said half shyly, "did you find Forbes all right?"

"No," was the sharp rejoinder, "I found him all wrong; but he has a doctor now and all we can do is hope for the best."

His manner rather than his words cast a cloud over the class. They realized for the first time that their chum was really sick and the fear that his illness might become very serious had the effect of subduing their usual animal spirits. Pinky Palmer felt worse than anyone else in the room. He knew very well that he had taunted Forbes into the contest and the unexpected consequence of their lark filled him with remorse.

As soon as class was dismissed for the

day he hurried over to Forbes' room, but to his surprise was not permitted to see his classmate. A nurse was in attendance and she simply said that the boy's condition was unchanged. Again, before retiring, Pinky called to learn if his friend was any better and was told that he had a very high fever and was now threatened with pneumonia. The red-haired one passed a very restless night. His sleep was broken and he repeatedly accused himself of being a thoughtless and heartless boy. Near morning he fell into a troubled slumber, but the moment he awoke he recalled the illness of his friend and there came a knocking at his heart that caused him actual pain.

On the morning of the second day it was reported that Forbes' fever was still high, but the doctor hoped that with careful nursing pneumonia might be avoided. All of the boys now were greatly concerned over the condition of their friend, and his illness became the general topic of conversation. Late in the afternoon of that day the doctor was hurriedly summoned

and passed into the sick room with an air of importance that was extremely depressing. After a long interval, he came out with his quick, professional stride. Pinky Palmer waylaid him in the hallway, and touching him on the arm said:

"Will you please tell me how Forbes is coming along?"

The doctor looked at him sharply for a moment and then said crisply:

"The crisis has arrived. Within an hour his condition will either improve, or we will have a bad case of pneumonia on our hands."

Pinky sank on the top step of the stairway, the picture of abject despair. There came a dryness in his throat and a sinking sensation in his heart such as he had never felt before. How long he stayed there he could not remember, but when he finally roused himself it was to discover the doctor hurrying into the room. He could not have remained there more than five minutes, but the awful suspense made it seem ten times as long. When he came out he was smiling, and as he buttoned up his

coat he gave Pinky a friendly slap on the shoulder:

"It's all right, my boy. The crisis is over and with careful nursing he will be better in a few days."

This prediction came true. On the morning of the third day, the Sleeping Beauty was sitting up in a chair, and the following afternoon he was strolling about the Academy grounds. Pinky Palmer was his constant companion and as they finished their walk, Forbes said:

"Pinky, the only regret I have is that I'll be compelled to miss the basketball game with Burlingham. But even if I can't play, I can root all right and you'll find me there, shouting for Bell Haven."

There was a silence for some moments and then Palmer said in a tone of unusual tenderness:

"Forbes, can you ever forgive me for nagging at you? I can't tell you how sorry I feel for what I've done."

The Sleeping Beauty reached over and put his big hand across Palmer's mouth.

"Forget it," he said. "You told me that

I was too fat—that I ought to train down. Well, I've done it all right. I've lost just twenty pounds in the last six days."

Pinky laughed.

"Your loss has been my gain," he said. "You've got less weight and I think I've got more sense. So we split even, old top."

CHAPTER IX

ADAM TELLS A SECRET

WALKING was a favorite diversion at the Bell Haven Academy and during the delightful October days many of the boys organized little parties for strolls through the woods. It was the week after the recovery of the Sleeping Beauty that Bobby Benson proposed a walk for the purpose of gathering chestnuts. The start was made directly after school hours, and the expedition was composed of Benson, Palmer, Forbes and Adam West.

"We're going to take you along for a chaperon," said Bobby to the white-bearded janitor.

"All right," was the cheerful response of the aged one; "maybe you'll be glad you took me along before you git home."

They started up the main road from Bell Haven and in less than a half hour were in the heart of an ancient wood. The

ground was thickly carpeted with autumn leaves and the pine trees threw out a pungent odor. It was an ideal day for pedestrians and the members of the quartette inhaled the health-giving ozone with eagerness and appreciation. Forbes, who had fully recovered his normal health and spirits, seemed to be in perfect condition. He marched ahead of the others with his chest out, his shoulders drawn back and both arms swinging like propellers. They chatted gayly as they proceeded on their way and then at intervals there was a long silence, broken only by some stray rabbit as it scurried across the dead leaves that beset their path.

Presently they came to a clearing in the woods. The boys had brought a package of food and sitting down, with legs crossed, they munched at sandwiches and cake—the product of Mrs. Bowen's culinary skill. Adam enjoyed himself as thoroughly as any of his young friends. His appetite was amazingly good and after finishing two chicken sandwiches and a large slice of ginger-bread, he startled the others by ask-

ing if any of them had such a thing as a boiled egg on their person.

"No, sir," replied Bobby Benson, speaking for the others, "and what's more, I wouldn't want to have the contract of feeding you."

Adam laughed lazily at this rejoinder and then throwing himself back on the bed of autumn leaves he closed his eyes and drank in great breaths of the wholesome air. There was a chestnut tree within sight of where they had been lunching and the boys, hunting up short, heavy clubs, attempted to dislodge the toothsome delicacies. Benson was one of the first to hurl his weapon at the towering tree. It was a crooked stick and much to his surprise it executed a circle in the air. He was gazing at it, open-mouthed, when it suddenly turned and came back, boomerang fashion, and struck him on the head. There was much laughing over this incident, but it did not interfere with Bobby's sport. He secured another big stick and by persistent throwing, managed to get a cap full of nuts. He was engaged in knocking the heavy burs from

the chestnuts, when his attention was directed to a curious motion in the underbrush near where Adam West was dozing. The leaves appeared to be moving up and down. Bobby watched the performance intently and presently he gave an exclamation of horror.

"I hope he don't move," he cried, "until I get there."

Pinky Palmer, who was seated on a stump of a tree picking the heart out of a chestnut with the aid of the small blade of his pocket knife, turned to his friend curiously:

"What's the matter, Bobby? Talking through your hat again?"

"No," replied the boy huskily, "but look over in Adam's direction and tell me what you see."

Palmer did as he was bade and after a moment said in a tense, long-drawn voice:

"It's a snake—and a big black one at that."

In the meantime Benson had stooped down and picked up a rock weighing ten or fifteen pounds. Holding this in both hands

he tip-toed in the direction of the sleeping janitor. The snake, which was long and venomous, was gradually but surely creeping near the body of the venerable one. The boy was trembling with excitement by this time, but he kept a cool head and never took his eyes off the reptile. Moving with the greatest caution, he managed to get in a position almost over the snake. Then lifting the stone high in the air, he hurled it at the creeping thing with all the strength at his command. His aim was accurate. The stone struck the reptile almost directly on the head and crushed it completely. Adam, hearing the noise, jumped to his feet at once and seeing the big stone at his feet, exclaimed heatedly:

"What in the dickens are you tryin' to do—kill your chaperon?"

Bobby shook his head with a smile.

"Not much. I've just been trying to save your life and I think I've succeeded. We don't want any dead janitor in this part of the country."

While the boy was speaking, Adam glanced down and seeing the snake, he

realized what had taken place and putting his arms around Benson's neck, gave him a friendly hug.

"Son," he said, "you're a friend in need and that's somethin' to warm the cockles of any man's heart."

The sun was going down by this time and it was deemed desirable to start on the homeward journey. The three boys and the man proceeded in silence. They were all thinking of the narrow escape that had been made by Adam West, and each of them, including the old man, felt somewhat awed by the incident. Presently they came out of the thickest part of the woods and reached the main highway leading to Bell Haven. They had not met anyone during their afternoon's ramble, but at this point a sudden elbow in the road revealed a shabbily dressed man scurrying to cover. They thought nothing of this at the time, but plied steadily on towards the town. Once Bobby, stooping down and picking up a stone, threw it aimlessly into the shrubbery that bordered the road. Instantly they heard a howl of anguish and when they

paused to investigate, discovered that the stone had accidentally struck the man who had crossed their path only a few minutes before.

They found him sprawling on the ground and cursing like a pirate. He was of medium build and his long, thin face was very white, suggestive of prison pallor. His eyes were bloodshot and there was a leer about the close-shaven mouth that filled Bobby Benson with distrust.

"I'm sorry," began the boy, "but I had no thought of hitting anybody."

The man pulled off his ragged cap and rubbed the back of his closely cropped skull with the palm of his hand.

"Sorry ain't goin' to do me any good," he muttered. "It may be all right for you, but it won't take the swellin' out of my head."

The three boys and the man were standing about him in a circle by this time. He looked them over in a critical manner and then said abruptly:

"Sorrow ain't goin' to fill my stomach either. I'm as hungry as a bear."

Pinky Palmer had saved one of the chicken sandwiches and he promptly pulled it out of his pocket and offered it to the abject-looking creature.

"Here's a snack," he said. "It isn't much, but it may help some."

The man took the proffered food and ate it ravenously. While he was engaged in doing this Bobby pulled out a silver coin and each of the others handed him some change. The boy offered it to the shabbily dressed one.

"Maybe this will help you out," he said.

The other grabbed it roughly and without a word of thanks turned on his heel and hurried away.

It was almost dark now, but the strollers were nearly in sight of home. The curious incident of the tramp had interested them greatly, but none of them had any comment to make. They walked along in silence for many moments. Adam West and Bobby Benson were together, while Forbes and Pinky Palmer were many yards in the rear. Bobby kept thinking of the man he had hit with the stray stone. Adam's mind was on

the same subject. The hoot of an owl greeted them as they hurriedly made their way to Bell Haven. The silence had continued for so long that it was beginning to be oppressive. It was the gray-bearded one who first attempted to pry off the conversational lid.

"Bobby," he said in a half-subdued tone, "that was a queer piece of business, wasn't it?"

"What do you mean? The tramp?"

"Yes, the tramp or whatever you want to call him. He looked to me like a criminal and he also gave me the impression of a man that might do desperate things."

"Maybe you're right," said Bobby, "but I rather pitied him. He looked to me as if there might be some good in him."

Adam chuckled.

"I guess you're right, son. Every living person must have a streak of good in him. Even a dark lantern has its bright side."

The boy did not like the bantering tone of his companion and he did not hesitate to say so.

"I don't suppose the fellow was an angel,"

he commented, "but I don't believe in striking a fellow when he's down."

The janitor gave his boyish companion a friendly clasp of the arm.

"You're perfectly right, Bobby. Never strike a man when he's down. He might get up and wallop the dickens out of you."

Benson laughed heartily at this sally and his mirth seemed to establish a still closer intimacy between them. The lights of Bell Haven were gleaming in the distance and they were likely to be home in a very few minutes. Adam slackened his steps somewhat and then, lowering his voice, said cautiously:

"Say, Bobby, if I tell you a secret, will you promise to keep it to yourself?"

Benson looked at the elderly one with a glance of indignation in his big brown eyes.

"Do you suppose that I'm a tattle-tale?"

"Not at all," was the hearty response, "but I only wanted to caution you in advance."

"Well," said the boy, "what is it that you are going to tell me?"

The janitor looked to the right and left

nervously as if he feared that what he was about to tell might be overheard. Then leaning over, he said in whispered tones:

"It's about that money I got from my uncle in Chicago. You know I told you that I had it in a safe place. It's stuffed inside of one of those black, horse-hair chairs in my bedroom. I put it there the night I came home and the chair's all fastened up in such a way that nobody would suspect that it had been tampered with. What do you think of that?"

Bobby had stopped short in amazement at this unexpected announcement.

"It's very romantic," he said, "but do you think it's safe to put so much money in such a queer place?"

"Safe," snorted the old man with a gesture of contempt, "why it's safer than the Bank of England. That's why I put it there."

CHAPTER X

ADAM GETS A SHOCK

THE Sleeping Beauty kept his promise to root for the Bell Haven Five at the game between the home team and Burlingham. It was a hard-fought battle and Forbes brought himself closer to the hearts of all the boys by the nearest road—the road of loyalty—but in spite of their hard playing and his never-ceasing shouts, yells and cries of approval, Bell Haven lost to their adversaries by a score of 12 to 2. The boys were depressed, of course, but their depression did not last very long. The very next day they began to practice for the game with Grantville and the vim and dash with which they went about their work was in itself an almost certain guarantee of success. Mike Murray, the trainer of the school, was present to coach the boys, and a few favored ones were permitted to look on while Bobby

Benson and his associates rehearsed a new set of signals.

"I hope we don't fail next Saturday," said Bobby as he wiped the beads of perspiration from his brow.

Murray, who had been watching the practice very closely, gave the boy a smile of encouragement and said briskly:

"In the bright lexicon of youth there is no such word as fail."

Adam West stroked his beard affectionately and gave a chuckle.

"I guess, Mike, you never tried to crawl under a circus tent."

"Yes, I have," retorted the trainer quickly, "and I witnessed the big show for nothing."

Adam laughed again.

"You're lucky," was his comment. "I tried the same thing once and I carry the marks of the barrel stave with me to this day."

The game with Grantville, which was scheduled for the following Saturday, brought quite a crowd to the Bell Haven Academy. It was the first meeting with

that team and Captain Benson felt that it was necessary to play a fast game and he urged all of the players to subordinate their personal desires for the sake of team work. He pointed out the folly of all of the boys trying to get the ball at the same time. He said that if they would keep their heads and try to remember where each fellow was likely to be on every separate play, there was a fair chance that they would be successful.

The gymnasium was crowded when the referee blew his whistle and tossed the ball in the air for the first play. The boys had rehearsed their signals so that they knew them by heart. The ball had scarcely left the referee's hands when Captain Benson ran his hand through his hair. This was the signal that Gordon Greely was to go for the sphere. He did so and with such success that the ball was passed from him to Palmer and then to Forbes before the Grantville players had realized exactly what had happened. The next moment, Nelson James had the oval in his hands and was tossing it into the basket for a goal. A

storm of applause from the spectators greeted this successful play.

Once again the ball was put into motion. This time Bobby placed his hand on his hip, which meant that Pinky Palmer, who was playing right forward, should go after it. The red-haired one was quick to take his instructions and with the assistance of his team-mates sent the ball into the basket for the second goal. The rapidity with which this was done seemed to daze the members of the visiting team. Also it caused the rooters for the home team to shout themselves hoarse. Tiberius Brown, who had a desirable seat next to the screen, could scarcely restrain himself. He carried his green-covered umbrella and in the midst of the excitement could be heard vigorously hammering it on the ground and shouting at the top of his voice:

"You're a little darling, Pinky—keep up the good work and we'll never forget you!"

As the din gradually died away the referee picked up the ball and prepared to put it into play again. It did not go so high this time and Benson with all of his

senses keyed to the highest pitch, raised his left hand in the air. This meant that Gordon Greely, who was on the left side of the center, should receive the tip-off and start the play. Greely was equal to the occasion. He made a short throw and landed the ball into the outstretched hands of Nelson James. Benson, in the meanwhile, had taken his stand directly in front of the basket and just in time to receive the oval from James. The members of the Grantville team came at him in a body, but they were too late, for by the time they had reached him, the ball was making its way through the basket for the third goal

It was the most brilliant playing that had been seen at Bell Haven since the opening of the season and the cheers of the spectators were long and heartfelt. It was evident that the system of signals mapped out by Bobby Benson and his team-mates was working like a charm. The result proved the importance of preparation. Bobby had no pride of authorship. He would have been quite willing to have deferred to his chums in the matter, but they

had gladly accepted his suggestions and insisted that he be the boy to designate the plays. He agreed to this willingly because the center seemed to be the proper person to give the signals. He was at the spot where the play started and was capable of knowing which play or signal to call off at a given time. By the end of the first period the signals became familiar to the Grantville players and Clark Johnson, the captain of that team, was quick to take advantage of this knowledge. The result was that two carefully planned plays on the part of the Bell Haven boys were defeated, and the Grantville team, becoming aggressive, succeeded in scoring their first goal.

After the first half of the game had been finished and while the boys were in the dressing room, Bobby called their attention to this fact.

"Fellows," he said, "they're getting onto our curves and we'll have to change our signals unless we want to lose the game."

"Do we look like chumps that want to throw the game away?" ejaculated Pinky Palmer in his quick, snappy manner.

"No!" came from the others in chorus.

"I didn't think so," commented Benson with a smile, "so if you fellows will keep your ears open, I'll go through the second set of signals which we have kept in reserve."

For the next five minutes the boy was kept busy explaining the emergency plan which had been agreed upon in case their first set of signals was discovered. When the whistle blew to resume playing, Captain Benson walked into the circle from the left. This meant that he was to tip the ball to either the left forward or the left guard. The moment the sphere went into the air, he knocked it into the waiting hands of Gordon Greely, who passed it along to Forbes, who in turn handed it to Pinky Palmer, who landed it in the heart of the basket. In the next play he entered the circle from the right side and this meant that the right forward or the right guard should be prepared to receive the ball. In this case, as before, they were able to make a goal with scarcely any interference on the part of their rivals. The ease with which they worked was largely due to the energy

and intelligence of Bobby Benson. In order to make signals successful, the center must be a player who is capable of out-jumping his opponent at the toss of the ball. Bobby was able to do this with comparative ease. He was several inches shorter than the captain of the Grantville team, but he was able to out-jump him. In most cases, however, it must be conceded that the taller man has the advantage. If the center is able to win the jump or toss-up, he has made a good beginning in the team work. He has the play started towards his opponent's goal. Incidentally, it may be said that it is better for the forward or guard to receive the ball while it is in the air, rather than when it hits the floor. It makes a faster play and puts a lot of ginger into the contest.

Bobby and his associates had read the opinions of experts in these matters and had digested them so thoroughly that they were able to meet every emergency as fast as it arose in the game. It was a further proof of the well-known fact that the boy who prepares carefully and thoroughly is ap

to be more successful than the careless or haphazard youth, whether this preparation is for studies or for sports. When the final whistle blew, the score stood 31 to 8 in favor of Bell Haven and some of the boys in the crowd were so enthusiastic that they wanted to pull Bobby out of the cage and carry him around the room on their shoulders, but Benson laughingly protested and after much difficulty was able to make his way to the dressing room, where he shook hands with Palmer, Forbes, Greely and James and assured them fervently that if it hadn't been for their brilliant playing the result might have been different. Each one in his turn disclaimed this generous credit and said the glory really belonged to the young captain.

The members of the Grantville team took their defeat gracefully and said they had the satisfaction of being beaten by a better team. Bobby and his associates had prepared a supper for their adversaries. It was a sort of jollification for the Bell Haven boys and a form of consolation for the Grantville players. Tiberius Brown and

Adam West were present as honor guests and after full justice had been done to the food and drink, there were a number of good-natured speeches, followed by the singing of college songs. Finally, as a proof of good fellowship, the members of the Bell Haven Five accompanied the Grantville team to the railroad station and sent them off feeling comparatively good in spite of their decisive defeat.

It was while they were on their way home from the station that Adam invited Bobby Benson and Pinky Palmer to go with him to his room.

"I haven't been there since mornin'," he said, "and I'd like you youngsters to come with me to help me while away a lonely hour or so."

They agreed without hesitation and as they were strolling in the direction of Mrs. Bowen's house, Bobby turned to his old friend and said:

"By the way, Adam, I've been thinking about that money of yours and I believe you're making a mistake in using those old chairs as a savings bank. It's a mighty

risky piece of business and if I were you, I'd take the money out and put it in a real bank."

Adam was silent for a few moments and when he spoke it was to say:

"Son, I believe you're right. You know I allus had a horror of the banks bustin', but if I'm spared till tomorrow morning I'll take the money out and deposit it in the Bell Haven Trust Company."

Mrs. Bowen, in all the glory of a newly laundered apron, met them at the door of the house. They were about to go up stairs at once, but she detained them in the hall.

"Just wait a moment," she said; "I've a big surprise for our old friend. Let me go first."

They paused while she led the way up the long, narrow stairs. Reaching Adam's room, she threw open the door of the apartment, which was brilliantly illuminated for the occasion.

"Now," she said with a flush of gratification on her honest countenance, "just see what I've done for you."

The old man and the two boys stood on the threshold and looked into the room. They opened their eyes in astonishment; and no wonder, for the room had been newly furnished. A large leather rocker and two walnut chairs of modern design were arranged along one side of the room.

"Well?" she said finallly, when the prolonged silence threatened to become embarrassing. "Don't you think it's fine?"

The same thought came into the minds of Adam and Bobby Benson simultaneously, but it was the venerable one who first found the power of speech.

"Y-e-s," he agreed in stammering tones, "but—what have you done with the black horse-hair chairs?"

The smile on the old lady's face grew more pronounced.

"I've sold them," she cried triumphantly, "and almost got enough money out of them to pay for the new furniture."

Adam did not say a word, but his face became white and he staggered back and would have fallen if the two boys had not been there to support him.

CHAPTER XI

CROSS-QUESTIONS

MRS. BOWEN gazed at her elderly boarder with undisguised amazement. Her first feeling was one of indignation at his lack of appreciation of the newly furnished room, but the evidence of physical weakness alarmed her at the same time that it aroused her sympathy. She made a movement as if to hurry down the hallway.

"I'll get some water to throw in his face," she exclaimed with feverish anxiety.

"Don't you do anything of the kind," cried Adam as he slowly straightened up. "I'm all right now."

"What in the world was the matter with you?" she queried, peering at him through her gold-rimmed spectacles.

"Oh, nothing," said the old man with poorly attempted gayety. "I wasn't feeling well and when I looked into that room it

was the last straw that broke the camel's back."

Mrs. Bowen betrayed a disposition to be angry. She sniffed suspiciously and then murmured sarcastically:

"I allus thought you had a sort of a hump on your back, but I never afore dreamt that you were a camel."

Adam laughed in spite of the disaster that had befallen him:

"Don't jump at conclusions, Mrs. Bowen," he said, "or else you may have to go limping back to the starting point."

"Whatever has got into your old head, Adam West?" she exclaimed with some vehemence.

Bobby put his hand gently on the janitor's arm as though by this act to show the sympathy he felt.

"Adam," he said kindly, "I think the best thing you can do is to explain the whole thing to Mrs. Bowen."

The venerable one rubbed the end of his nose with his hand and looking at his landlady out of his shrewd old eyes, said:

"First let me ask you a question, Mrs. Bowen."

She put her arms akimbo and exclaimed defiantly:

"Go ahead—I'm ready for you."

"Who got the chairs?" asked the janitor.

"Who got the chairs?" she replied. "Why, that fellow that comes around here selling all kinds of household stuff. I don't know his name. We call him Skinny, the tin peddler."

"Is there any chance of reaching him tonight?"

She laughed, a shrill sort of laugh.

"Any chance? Why, he must be a hundred miles from here if he's a mile and we'll be lucky if we see him again in the next two months."

Adam sighed as he walked into the room and seated himself on the edge of the bed.

"Well, Mrs. Bowen," he began as he moistened his dry lips with the tip of his tongue, "it's jist this way. I've been an old fool and now I've got to pay the consequences of my folly."

"What do you mean?" she asked sharply.

"It's jist this. I came into a fortune some time ago, as you remember. I got it all in good United States bank notes. I was afraid of the banks. I got the notion that they might bust up and I'd lose all of my boodle. I guess I got that crazy idea from that uncle of mine. He must have been gone in the head. He surely acted like a man that was half-cracked. Anyhow, I thought I'd play smart, so I used one of those chairs for the savings bank. Jist ripped the cover off of one of them and hid my money there. Of course you didn't know anything about it, but it's gone just the same; and now if Skinny, the tin peddler, only knew it, he's a rich man—he's runnin' what you might call a perambulatin' bank."

Mrs. Bowen gave a shriek of startled dismay on receipt of this information. Her first impulse was to throw her apron over her head, but she resisted this and wrung her hands in despair.

"It's terrible," she cried, "it's terrible; and to think that I jist chucked that fortune of yours out of the house."

Adam rose and placed his hand on her shoulder.

"It's all right, Mrs. Bowen. I told you it wasn't your fault. I'm an old fool and I had no right to do such a darn bug-house trick."

A tear rolled down the cheek of the sympathetic landlady as she replied:

"You're not a fool, Adam West, and I won't let you call yourself any sich names. What you did was for the best. We're all liable to make mistakes and you're no worse than the rest of us."

The venerable one grinned broadly at this praise.

"Thank you, Mrs. Bowen," he said bowing, "thank you. Kind words is like cats—they never die."

The two boys had been listening to the dialogue between the landlady and her boarder with great patience, but they were becoming restless by this time and it was Bobby Benson who first voiced this feeling.

"See here, Adam," he cried with boyish impulsiveness, "there's no use standing here chewing the rag. Let's try to get

down to the bottom of this business. I'd like to ask a few questions."

Mrs. Bowen nodded her head in approval of this sentiment.

"If you don't mind," she said, "we'll go down to the parlor. We can talk better there. Besides," and she lifted the corner of her apron to wipe away an insistent tear, "the sight of this furniture keeps reminding me of Mr. West's loss."

So the members of the party slowly filed down-stairs and made their way into the old-fashioned parlor. Adam took a seat on the sofa and crossing his legs, stroked his white beard in a reflective manner. Mrs. Bowen and Pinky Palmer found chairs on either side of the sofa. Benson, pulling the organ stool into the center of the room, made himself as comfortable as he could under the circumstances.

"Mrs. Bowen," he said in the tone of a lawyer who is about to cross-examine a difficult witness, "are you acquainted with this Skinny, the tin peddler?"

The landlady's heavy eyebrows fairly bristled.

"Certainly not. He's no acquaintance of mine. He simply comes around here every now and then selling kitchen utensils."

"What I mean," persisted the youthful investigator, "is, would you know him again if you met him?"

"I certainly would," she replied with grim determination.

"Did he suggest the purchase of the furniture?"

"No," she answered slowly, "I think I spoke of it to him. Of course, he makes a business of trading. He'd swap anything he had for anything he could get, if you were willing to give something to boot."

"Yes," assented Bobby with a trace of sarcasm, "and in this instance he got something to boot."

"Look here, young man," cried the witness, "if you think you're goin' to play smart with me, I'll put you across my knee and give you a good spankin'."

"My dear Mrs. Bowen," replied the boy with a smile, "I had no such thought. What I'm trying to find out is whether

there is a chance of getting back Adam's money."

"Oh," she said, instantly mollified, "I'm willin' to do anything I can to help the poor man."

"Do you think the peddler bought the chairs for his own use?"

"I'm sure he didn't. He'll try to sell them. That man would sell the clothes off his back if he could get anybody to buy such useless things."

"Do you know what route he usually takes?"

"I'm not certain, but I think he has a line of customers all through this county. He starts at Burlingham, goes through Bell Haven and Cleverly and then through Westville and Gloucester."

Bobby scratched his head in perplexity.

"When did you make the trade?"

"Early this morning, but he left in a big hurry and he must be out of the county by this time."

"Still there may be a chance of overtaking him."

"Yes," she assented reluctantly, "there

may be a chance, but I doubt it very much."

Bobby stooped down and picked up his cap.

"I know what I'm going to do now," he said. "I'm going to notify the Chief of Police and get him to telegraph some of the towns in the neighborhood."

Adam's face brightened.

"Bobby," he said, "I don't know what I'd do without you. You certainly know how to think when a fellow's in trouble."

The boy laughed.

"I'm afraid you've got a funny notion about me, Adam. I haven't done a thing for you yet, but if it's possible to get on the trail of this fellow, I'm going to do it for you, but if you ever get this money back, it's going to teach you a lesson. You've got to believe in banks—you've got to believe in a great many things in this world if you expect to get along."

The old man nodded.

"With the help of humility I will."

They had all risen by this time and were about to turn and leave the room, when a

scratching sound attracted the attention of Bobby Benson. He turned quickly and glanced in the direction of the window. He saw a pair of evil eyes peering into the apartment.

"Look!" he called, pointing to the face at the window, "someone's been listening to us."

He made a rush to the front door, followed by the others, but the person whose presence had been detected had already taken alarm and was scurrying away. The sudden opening of the front door sent a flood of light out into the darkness and for the space of one or two seconds the man was bathed in its brilliance.

Bobby, who was looking very intently, got a mental pen picture of the fellow that remained in his memory for many days. The eavesdropper was a man of medium build and dressed very shabbily. His face had a dead, dull whiteness suggestive of prison pallor. He had small, ferret-like, bloodshot eyes with red rims around them. He wore a ragged cap on the back of his closely-cropped head and there was an

incessant leer around the corners of his closely-shaven mouth that gave Bobby an uncomfortable sort of feeling. The man had by this time been swallowed up in the darkness. It was almost useless to attempt to follow him and besides there could be no immediate object in doing so. The boy turned to the janitor.

"Did you get sight of that fellow?"

Adam nodded his head.

"I sure did and I can't say that I like him, neither."

"There is something very familiar about his face to me," said the boy slowly, as if trying to refresh his memory.

"I know who he is," cried Adam excitedly, "and so do you. Don't you remember?"

"Who is he?" asked Bobby.

"Why he's the tramp we met in the woods," exclaimed the venerable one. "I wouldn't forget that fellow's face in a hundred years."

CHAPTER XII

CROOKED PURPOSES

IT was impossible to locate the Chief of Police that night, but Bobby and Pinky were on his trail the first thing in the morning, and finally discovered him at his home calmly doing justice to a breakfast of ham and eggs. He recognized the boys at once, having had some experience with them at the time the Bell Haven boat-house was robbed. He seemed to be amused at the sight of the youngsters, for his broad face broke into a grin as he said in his most jovial manner:

"Well, what's gone wrong up to the Academy now?"

"It's not the Academy—it's something else."

"What is it?"

Bobby paused for a moment and then looked at Pinky as if seeking the easiest way of bringing the startling information

to the attention of the minion of the law. Presently he said impressively:

"Did you ever hear of Skinny, the tin peddler?"

The grin on the Chief's face grew a little broader as he replied, with the utmost good nature:

"Sure, that's the meller-drammer we had at the opery house last winter."

"No! No! No!" exclaimed the boy impatiently. "It isn't a melodrama at all."

"Then it's a moving picture," retorted the head of the police force of Bell Haven.

"Wrong again," cried Bobby, who was inclined to laugh now. "It's a man."

"What's his real name?"

"I don't know."

"Well, what about him?"

"He's gone away with $1200 belonging to Adam West, the janitor of the Academy."

"The dickens ye say!" exclaimed the Chief, rising and for the first time showing interest in the conversation. "What did he do—break in the house?"

"No."

"Was it highway robbery?"

"No."

"Well, what in the name of Jericho was it, anyhow?"

"You won't give me a chance to tell you," insisted the boy. "You keep asking me questions."

"Seems to me you came in here with a conundrum yourself. But go ahead and tell your story."

Bobby proceeded to relate the tale of how Adam had come into a fortune, of how he had concealed it inside of the old black horse-hair chair and of how Mrs. Bowen, in a moment of thriftiness had sold the four-legged bank to the tin peddler. At the conclusion of the narrative the limb of the law fell back into his chair and laughed until the tears streamed down his face. Finally, after his mirth had almost spent itself, Bobby asked indignantly:

"You think it's funny, do you?"

He nodded his head in assent.

"It's the funniest thing I ever heard since Mirandy played that awful trick on me. Mirandy, you know, is my wife.

Last winter a year she kept pesterin' me for things for the kitchen. I told her I hadn't no money for that sort of truck. I came home one night an' she was all smiles. I asked her what made her so happy an' she said she had the new-fangled culinary trappin's at last. I asked her where she got the money an' she said she sold my old coat to a peddler an' in return he had given her the finest fryin' pan in Bell Haven. Well, the joke of it was that that was the only coat I had, and the next day a cold wave came an' I couldn't go to work an' we didn't have nothin' to fry in the pan."

And at the remembrance of this episode in his married life the officer lay back in his chair and laughed again. Bobby and Pinky laughed too, out of sympathy, but presently Pinky said:

"That's very interesting, my friend, but it doesn't get us anywhere?"

"What do you mean?"

"I'd like to know where we get off?" retorted Benson.

"Say, sonny," warned the Chief, "you've

got to talk plain United States if ye expect me to understand you."

"Very well," replied Bobby, "we would like to know what you propose to do about this robbery?"

"Was it a robbery?"

"Well, what would you call it?"

"I dunno," was the cautious reply. "It seems to me more like a lottery. Mrs. Bowen thought she was a-gettin' the best of the peddler, but it looks to me as if Skinny, as ye call him, had come nigh drawin' the capital prize in that lottery."

"I suppose that's true enough," agreed Bobby wearily, "but we felt that after we told you about it you might help us to recover the money."

"Lands a massey!" exclaimed the officer with genuine surprise. "What have I got to do with it?"

"You're an officer of the law, aren't you?"

The provoking one smiled in an amiable manner.

"I'm supposed to protect the life an' the property of the citizens of Bell Haven."

"That's just it!" exclaimed the boy excitedly. "Adam West's money has been taken and we want you to help him to get it back."

The Chief smiled sadly.

"You've jest said that the money was not stolen."

"But what's the difference—it's gone."

"A big difference; it's got to be a legal crime before I can take any action."

"What can we do to make it what you call legal."

"Well," said the literal one, stroking his face gently, "the first thing you'd have to do would be to find out the real name of this Skinny, the tin peddler. Nicknames, ye know, don't go in the law. After that you'd have to swear out a warrant charging him either with larceny or burglary. You'll have to consult a lawyer to know the exact charge to make."

The boy's face flushed with anger and indignation. He turned to his chum with a gesture of annoyance.

"Come on, Pinky," he called, "there's no use fooling any longer with this old

Dodo. He doesn't know enough to get in out of the wet."

The Chief of Police only grinned in a good-natured way.

"I don't know what you mean by a Dodo, but I suppose it's all right, because you wouldn't call an officer of the law out of his name. As fer gettin' in out of the wet, I don't see no occasion for that neither. We've had a mighty long dry spell in these parts."

The boys had wasted almost an hour with the helpless official and they hurried back to Bell Haven to reach the Academy in time for the opening session of school. As they reached the grounds they met Adam West. He was looking pale and somewhat subdued, but at sight of the boys he made an effort to cheer up a bit.

"I was jist over at your room," he said to Bobby, "an' I heard that you'd gone out before breakfast."

"Yes," replied Benson, "we've been over to call on the Chief of Police, but we didn't get any satisfaction. He's about as useless as the fifth wheel of a wagon."

"What did he say?" asked the old man wearily.

Bobby rehearsed all that had taken place at the home of the official. At its conclusion the janitor said:

"I can't say that I blame him. I don't expect any one to have any sympathy with a foolish man like I am. I'm what you boys would call a pinhead."

"We won't say any more about that," interrupted Benson. "What we want to do is to find some way of recovering your money. Now it seems to me that the best thing we can do is to lay the matter before Doctor Maury. He's a sensible man and he can tell us just what to do."

"If ye love me, boy," he cried, "you won't say a word about this to the Doctor. If he ever heard of it I'd feel so foolish and sheepish that I'd want to crawl into a hole somewhere and pull the hole in after me."

"Still," persisted the boy, "you've got to sacrifice your feelings when you have so much at stake."

The venerable one shook his head in a whimsical way.

"That's where you're wrong, my boy. I've sacrificed so much of my feelings already that I feel as though I jist can't afford to lose any more of them and keep my self-respect. I want the money bad enough, but I declare to goodness, I feel as if I'd sooner lose it than have the Doctor laughing at me."

"He wouldn't laugh at you," said the boy. "He's not that sort of a man."

"Well, maybe he wouldn't laugh at me openly, but he'd laugh up his sleeve, and that's jist a little bit worse. But don't tell him now. Let's see what can be done first. Later on, if the cat comes out of the bag, I won't make no objection."

Bobby and Pinky had to go into the class room, but promised their old friend as soon as they got through for the day they would make an effort to trace the progress of the tin peddler. In the meantime they advised Adam to have a heart-to-heart talk with Mrs. Bowen to try and get all of the information from her that was possible. Likewise it was suggested that he tell the

landlady not to speak of the matter to anybody else.

The boys found it very difficult to keep their minds on their studies that day. Bobby had to write a composition on Shakespeare's tragedy of Macbeth. It seemed to him to be the hardest task he had ever undertaken. He had made a study of the famous play and under ordinary circumstances could have written an essay that would have brought him a D with possibly some complimentary reference by the teacher, but now it seemed almost impossible to get his thoughts on paper. He started off with a passage describing the murder of the king by Macbeth, only to find Adam's $1200 looming up as a part of the Shakesperean tragedy. His eyes were on the pad in front of him, but his thoughts were in the little room with the three black horse-hair chairs.

Finally, however, he got through this task in some way or other and then proceeded with the other lessons of the day. Tiberius Brown noticed that the boy was very absent-minded and once chided him

for his lack of attention, but Bobby only smiled and said he would try and do better the next time. He gave a sigh of relief when the hour came for dismissing the class, and grabbing up his cap rushed out to find Adam.

The janitor was waiting for him at the gate of the Academy. He said that he had talked to Mrs. Bowen, but that she was unable to add very much to his stock of information. Among other things he had obtained a fairly good description of the tin peddler. Mrs. Bowen said that the man was a perfect model of the cartoons of Uncle Sam which were to be found in the illustrated newspapers. He was tall, lean, lanky and had what she called a "nanny-goat beard."

She insisted that all he needed was a high white hat and a swallow-tail coat to make him look exactly like the person who is so widely pictured as the typical Yankee. Also she said that the wagon was drawn by a sorrel horse and had a white canvas cover.

Bobby whistled for Pinky Palmer and

the two boys started off, promising to let Adam know the result of their inquiries later in the evening. Going from Mrs. Bowen's house, they made their way slowly through Bell Haven. Every little while they stopped at one of the stores to ask questions concerning the tin peddler. They found two persons who recalled having seen him go in the direction of Cleverly. In twenty minutes they had crossed the line into that town and had no difficulty in locating three witnesses who had purchased various articles from the peddler. The last one was a druggist who was known to both the boys. After he had answered Benson's question he turned to him curiously and said:

"This fellow seems to be in great demand. What's he been doing?"

"Oh, nothing special," said Bobby in a hesitating tone, "but why do you ask me that?"

"Because you're not the first one whose been trying to learn of his whereabouts."

The boy looked startled.

"Who else has been asking about him?"

"A stranger was in here this morning and he seems very anxious to know how to reach our peddler friend."

"What did he look like?"

"Why, he was very shabby looking and had a very pale face and closely cropped hair."

Benson turned to Palmer.

"Pinky," he said, "there's something crooked going on and that fellow's at the bottom of it."

It was too dark to continue their investigations any further that night and they slowly retraced their steps in the direction of Bell Haven.

CHAPTER XIII

ON THE TRAIL OF THE PEDDLER

IT came to pass that a distinguished visitor called at the Bell Haven Academy the following morning. He was an Englishman visiting America, and among other things he had been recommended to call at Dr. Maury's establishment if he desired to see a model preparatory school for boys—one, in fact, that would compare favorably with the institution in England where the famous Tom Brown received his education.

The eminent visitor was duly impressed with what he saw and consented to make a little address to the boys. After he had concluded, Dr. Maury, in honor of the great event, informed the pupils that they might have a holiday. The announcement was greeted with prolonged cheers and the boys piled out of the building laughing

and skylarking and filled with animal spirits at the prospect of a free day.

Pinky Palmer was one of the first to reach the grounds and seeing Bobby Benson a few yards in front of him called to him.

"Hello, Bobby, what are you going to do with yourself, now that you find time hanging heavy on your hands?"

"Can't you guess?"

"You bet I can. You're going to spend the day trying to find something about that stolen fortune."

"You're a mind reader," laughed Benson, "it's the very thing I've been thinking about. We've traced this mysterious peddler as far as it is possible to walk and now my idea is to take the train to Hedgewater today and see if I can't find something about him in that city. How'd you like to go along?"

"Suits me down to the gound," was the crisp response, "and if you'll wait until I go over to my rooms, I'll join you in about ten minutes."

"What do you want to go over to your

rooms for?" asked Bobby, who was impatient to start for the station.

Pinky winked.

"I've left me purse in me fur-lined overcoat on top of the Baby Grand piano an' I'm afraid the butler may trip over it while he's polishin' the family diamonds."

Bobby grinned.

"Oh, in that case I'll excuse you, but meet me at the station. There's a train that leaves in twenty minutes and we might as well get to Hedgewater as soon as we can."

Pinky kept his appointment and the two boys started on their journey. They were filled with the spirit of the adventure and their active minds were mapping out the plan of procedure they should follow when they reached the city.

It was a perfect autumn day and the country had the air of melancholy beauty so peculiar to that season of the year. It was cold and the roads were dry, with just a touch of frost. The trip was a diversion and a change from the ordinary routine of school life, so, taking one thing with

another, the boys felt as though they were on a vacation rather than going on the trail of a stolen fortune.

Hedgewater was reached in due time and when Bobby and his chum alighted from the train they were unexpectedly surprised at the noise and bustle of the streets. Hedgewater was a much more important place than Bell Haven and the sudden change from the quiet college town was as disconcerting as it was refreshing. Unconsciously the boys found themselves following the crowd and for the first time it dawned upon them that they were in the position of hunting for a needle in a haystack. Bobby believed that the tin peddler must have come from Hedgewater, but that was merely based on the fact that Hedgewater was the nearest large city to Bell Haven. Now that he was actually in the place he realized that his belief after all was nothing more than a mere guess.

Presently they came to a market place and adjoining it was a large stable-yard filled with empty wagons. It was curiosity that prompted Bobby to look in that

direction, but as he did so his eye lighted on a large country wagon with a white canvas cover. He grabbed Palmer by the arm and brought him to a sudden halt.

"Say, Pinky," he exclaimed shrilly, "do you see that big white-covered wagon over there?"

"Yes," was the reply, "what about it?"

"What about it?" echoed Benson, "Why, it just answers the description of the old hulk that carried off Adam's greenbacks."

Palmer took a second look in the direction pointed out by his chum and after a moment's reflection, said:

"I believe you're right, Bobby. Let's go in and see if we can find out who owns the old hunk of junk."

They went in the yard and after making inquiries discovered that the wagon belonged to a man named Sam Simon who lived in a house on the old Bailey Road which was located on the outskirts of the city.

It did not take the boys long to reach this place. It was an old-fashioned residence with a brass knocker on the door,

and when Bobby seized this he rapped it with a violence that was sufficient to raise the dead from their graves. Presently a woman in a calico wrapper and a sunbonnet came to the door. She was in a very bad humor and evidently not pleased by the noise made by her visitors.

"What do you want?" she snapped.

"I want to have a few minutes' conversation with Mr. Sam Simon," replied the boy.

"Well, you can't," she retorted.

"Why not?"

"Because he isn't here."

"But I'm told he lives here."

"He did once. He doesn't now. We couldn't get along together and so I told him the best thing for him to do was to get out."

"Where is he now?"

"I don't know and I don't care."

"But haven't you any idea?" persisted the youthful investigator, fearful of losing the trail just when it was becoming hot.

"It's pretty hard to tell where Sam Simon is going to be at a given time, but

I can tell you one thing, and that is he's not working. He's one of those lazy fellows that go into winter quarters. It wouldn't surprise me if he'd gone south for the cold spell. The chances are we won't see or hear anything about him until he comes tramping in here in the spring time."

This was disappointing, but Bobby and Pinky were compelled to make the best of it. They spent a few hours in the city, looking in the windows and seeing the sights. They finally took the train back to Bell Haven. They talked constantly of the experiences they had met with and they were so engrossed in the subject that they got out of the train at Cleverly instead of Bell Haven. However, it was less than a half-hour's walk from one town to the other, so they started on their tramp in a good-natured way.

It was dusk by this time and as they passed along the main street of the little town they saw lights burning in the office of the Cleverly *Clarion*. The sight gave Pinky Palmer an inspiration.

"Say, Bobby," he exclaimed, "what's

the matter with going over and calling on our old friend, the editor of the paper?"

"That's a bully idea," agreed Benson; "he may be able to give us some good advice regarding this business."

"But Adam don't want you to talk about it," cautioned the red-haired one.

"Oh, that's all right," said Bobby. "I'm not going to spread the news broadcast, but we've got to use some discretion in the matter and our *Clarion* friend may be able to help us."

By this time they were walking up the dark stairway leading to the editorial sanctum of the little weekly paper. The editor, who was seated at his desk going over some proofs, recognized them at once and greeted them cordially.

"What good wind has blown you into this part of the world?"

Bobby told him in as few words as possible and then went on to say that their visit to the *Clarion* was the merest accident.

"We noticed the light in your window and I thought you might be able to tell us what to do to solve this puzzle."

The moulder of public opinion leaned back in his swivel chair and scratched the back of his head with the end of a lead pencil.

"I really think that you've done all that you can do for the present, but if I were in your place, I'd run a little personal notice in the *Clarion* calling on the tin peddler to communicate with you. It can't do any harm and it might do some good."

After a general talk between the editor and Bobby and Pinky, it was decided to have a notice inserted in the following issue of the *Clarion*. The paper circulated over quite a large territory and there was a possibility that it might fall into the hands of the man for whom they were searching. The notice, when it was completed, read as follows:

> If the tin peddler who purchased three black horse-hair chairs from Mrs. Bowen on the morning of October 17th will communicate with Robert Benson, care of the Bell Haven Academy, he will confer a great favor upon one of his customers and will also learn something to his advantage.

The boys shook hands with the editor very cordially and thanked him for his suggestion. It was quite late now and they hurried in order to reach Bell Haven before supper time. As they entered the gates, Benson turned to Palmer and said with much earnestness:

"Pinky, somehow or other I feel that we haven't wasted our day. I believe it's going to lead to results in the near future."

CHAPTER XIV

A LETTER TO BOBBY

THE Christmas holidays had come and gone. The basketball season was drawing to a close and the boys of Bell Haven were already dreaming of the long vacation, but still no word of any kind had been received concerning the tin peddler and the missing fortune. Bobby and Pinky and Adam had talked it over during the winter nights, but their chats had brought them no nearer to the solution of the mystery.

"One good thing about it," said Bobby to the venerable one, "is the fact that it has not soured your disposition. If I had lost a fortune, I'm sure it would curdle the milk of human kindness in my manly bosom. I'd feel pretty sore at the fellow that got away with the cash."

Adam smiled in his benevolent way and stroked his long beard gently.

"Son, I have a forgivin' disposition and if I could catch the fellow that's got my money, I'd forgive him, but first I'd want to thrash him within an inch of his life."

The great event in February was the basketball game with the Williams College team. That organization had developed several snappy players and was now contesting for first place with the Bell Haven team. Benson realized that it was going to be a stiff fight, but he felt confident that the home team would win. In spite of this feeling he was anxious to prevent his own players from what is popularly known as a "swelled head." They held two or three conferences, in the course of which the young captain explained the Williams College team's method of playing.

"It won't do for us to go at them the way we have gone after the other clubs in the league," he said to his team-mates. "They would bust up our offensive play in about three shakes of a lamb's tail. This is a time when we must be on the defensive."

Mike Murray, the coach, assured Bobby

that he was perfectly right in his contention. He said:

"It is mighty hard to say just what you ought to do until the game begins. After the ball is put into play you will know just what should be done. It may be necessary to go on the defensive, and it may be desirable to try the offensive, but at all events you will make no mistake to practice the defensive plays every day from now on, until you meet the Williams team in the cage."

There was a big crowd on hand to witness the contest. In fact, the interest in this game was so great that many persons who came from Bell Haven and Cleverly were turned away on account of lack of standing room. When the two teams trotted into the court they were received with enthusiastic applause, but Bobby and his associates paid no attention to the demonstrations of the crowd. They had become used to this sort of thing and were sufficiently seasoned now to keep their eyes on the ball and their minds on the game. Bobby had a talk with his players just be-

fore he entered the cage and he told them to avoid fouls as much as possible, but to do everything in their power to get the ball.

The game started with a rush. Captain Harkins of the Williams team was the first one to get the ball. He tossed it to the right forward, but Pinky Palmer, with the alertness of a deer, rushed up and grabbed the ball from his hands. Harkins seemed to lose his head at this unexpected move and tried to spoil the play by giving the red-haired one a violent push. The referee blew his whistle.

"Foul!" he cried.

Much chagrined, the Williams players had to stand aside while the ball was handed to Bobby Benson, who shot it squarely into the basket and scored the first point for the Bell Haven Five.

The game started again and it soon became evident that the Williams boys were bent on playing a rough game. The result of this was to have a number of fouls called on them which placed them at a great disadvantage. The visitors had a

team composed of stars who hoped to win on the score of their individual excellence. They lacked team work, however, and Captain Benson was quick to note the weak points in their offensive playing.

When the play was resumed again Pinky Palmer evoked applause by some very fast dribbling. Captain Harkins waited until he started to bounce the ball and then tried to snatch it while it was in the air, but the red-haired one was too quick for him and succeeded in getting the sphere into the circle from whence he shot it into the basket with perfect ease. After that the Bell Haven team seemed to have things all their own way. They had begun with defensive play, but now they took the offensive and the swiftness with which they handled the ball seemed to take the wind out of their opponents. In the earlier stage of the game it looked as if they might be beaten on account of the unscrupulous manner in which the Williams players sought to take an unfair advantage of them. Greely and Forbes wanted to go back at the visitors in their own style, but

Bobby cautioned them that it would never do to play dirty ball. And so it proved.

The Bell Haven Five by playing a fast, clean game won over the other team, which wasted the greater part of its time and energy in foolish attempts to disconcert their opponents.

It was just before the whistle blew for the conclusion of the game that Captain Harkins was guilty of a most disreputable action. Several times during the game he had tried to spoil the shots of the Bell Haven players by striking their arms or pushing them, but they endured this unsportsmanlike conduct with no complaint to the referee. That official, however, was on the alert, and he called a foul every time any of the rules were trespassed. In the play under consideration, Palmer had started the ball and passed it to Forbes, who in turn passed it on to little Nelson James. Dribbling the ball as he went, the plucky youth was making his way toward the basket when Captain Harkins deliberately put out his foot and tripped James, sending him sprawling head first

on the floor. There was a shout of anger from every player on the Bell Haven team and this shout was echoed and re-echoed by the big crowd outside the cage.

Shouts of "Shame!" and "Foul!" could be heard above the din of the protesting voices. Pinky Palmer in his hot-headed, impulsive way made a dash in the direction of the Williams player.

"You big bully," he cried, "I'm going to punch your nose for that dirty trick."

He would have carried the threat into execution had it not been for the alertness of Bobby Benson. The captain of the Bell Haven Five grabbed the infuriated Palmer by the arm and pulled him back.

"It may be all right for you, Pinky," he said in a stage whisper, "but we can't afford to get into any rough-house business, especially in our own gymnasium."

The referee had taken charge of affairs by this time and of course he promptly called a foul, besides rebuking the captain of the Williams team for his contemptible conduct. After that the game proceeded without interruption and when it was over,

the score stood 24 to 11 in favor of the Bell Haven team. The referee, in order to prevent trouble, sent the Williams players to their dressing room before he permitted the audience to leave the hall.

It was after Bobby and Pinky had taken their shower baths and returned to the dormitory that Benson received word that a letter was waiting for him at the office of the Academy. He hurried there and was handed a soiled envelope addressed to him in a scrawling hand.

He opened it and this is what he read, after making due allowances for bad spelling and bad punctuation:

> Dear Sir:
>
> I read your personal in the Cleverly *Clarion* and this is to notify you that I am the tin peddler that bought the chairs from Mrs. Bowen. I want you to know in advance that I am a busy man. I've got all the insurance I want and I don't care for any green goods. If you'll remember this and not take up much of my time, you can find me at the White Horse Hotel in Cleverly next Wednesday night at seven o'clock.

Let me know right away if you will be there.

Your very obedient servant,

Sam Simon.

Benson was so elated with the receipt of this letter that he ran all the way to Adam's boarding house in order to show it to the old gentleman. He was as much surprised as the boy, but evidently not quite so hopeful.

"You think there is some hope then, do you?" queried the old man as he rubbed the back of his head with the palm of his hand, and looked at Benson in a wistful sort of way.

"Sure," cried the boy with all the energy and enthusiasm of youth; "while there's life, there's always hope."

CHAPTER XV

THE FIRST CHAIR

PROMPTLY at the time appointed Bobby Benson made his way to the White Horse Hotel to keep the appointment he had made with the somewhat eminent person who had become known to fame as Skinny, the tin peddler. Adam West accompanied the boy, but the usual lively spirits of the janitor were overcast by the character of the errand on which they were bent. The venerable one felt a twinge of reproach. He was naturally more or less sheepish over the thought of how he had lost his money and in addition to that he had begun to feel that he was incompetent and at fault in not following up the original clue.

The hotel was one of the old-fashioned road houses which still remain in certain sections of the country as reminders of the days which have gone into the lumber

rooms of history. It was a two-story structure with a mansard roof and in front of the main entrance was a large weather-beaten sign containing the picture of a great white horse. The top of this bore the name of the hostelry. The lower part of it contained the inscription, "entertainment for man and beast."

The place was quite familiar to the janitor, but the boy had never been inside its walls. Adam stepped up to the desk and informed the landlord that Bobby had an appointment with one of his guests named Sam Simon.

"Oh, yes," was the genial response, "he's expecting you. Just go up stairs and you'll find him in the first room to the left."

The man and the boy did as they were directed and tapping on the door, were invited to "come in" in a loud, nasal voice. As they opened the door and walked into the apartment, they were greeted by a long, thin, white-haired and white-whiskered individual. He was not quite so heavily set as Adam, but in almost

every other respect he might have been taken for a twin brother of the janitor.

"Well, neighbor," he cried out in a cheery tone, extending a long, thin hand, "how's your health, anyhow?"

"It's fair to middlin'," replied Adam, instinctively taking a liking to the stranger.

"You're aging some, though."

"What makes you think so?" interrogated Adam, somewhat surprised at this remark.

"Oh, jist your way of expressin' yourself. When I hears a man like you gettin' cautious about handin' out an opinion, I know that's a sign that he's gettin' old."

This bit of philosophy had the effect of establishing cordial relations between the two men. The janitor almost felt that he had known the peddler for years. He turned to him in a familiar manner.

"Mr. Simon, I want you to meet Mr. Robert Benson of the Bell Haven Academy."

The peddler almost bent to the ground with a burlesque bow and wave of the hand.

"Glad to meet you, Mr. Benson."

The boy flushed at this bit of mockery.

"Bobby Benson, if you please," he said, trying to get rid of the feeling that the stranger was poking fun at him.

"Well, Bobby, what can I do for you?"

Benson pulled out the note he had received from the peddler and holding it out to him said:

"I came to you in response to this letter."

"Oh, that's it, is it? So, Bobby, you're the fellow that tried to take my name in vain?"

"Yes," answered Benson, "but I did it in a good cause. Here's the cause," and he pointed to Adam West.

The tall, thin one looked at Adam with a quizzical smile.

"Neighbor, I don't think we've been introduced yet."

"This is Adam West," interrupted Bobby hastily, "and he's the cause of all the trouble."

After this explanations were in order.

Adam did most of the talking and he made a clean breast of the whole business. The peddler listened with the keenest interest. After the janitor had concluded his story he said in an apologetic tone:

"I've only one request to make, my friend, and that's that you won't laugh at the folly of an old man."

"Laugh," ejaculated the other. "I feel more like cryin', only it never was any use cryin' over spilt milk. I had an experience somewhat similar to yours, but it was a bright landlady that made me look like thirty cents."

"What was it?" asked Bobby.

"Why, once I put a wallet containin' fifty dollars in the parlor stove for safe keepin'. I'd been livin' in that house for years and never knew that stove to be in commission, but the very morning I started to use it as a safe deposit vault, darned if that landlady didn't come down and make a fire in that stove and burn up my hard-earned cash."

The three of them joined in the hearty laugh that followed. After the mirth had

died out, Bobby turned to the peddler and said:

"Mr. Simon, what we came to see you about——"

"Don't Mister me," exclaimed the peddler impulsively. "Call me Sam or I'll think you don't like me."

"All right, Sam," resumed Bobby, getting into practice at once. "What we came to see you about was to find out what you did with those chairs."

The peddler chuckled.

"Sold them—sold every darn one of them the day after I bought them from Mrs. Bowen, and I don't mind tellin' you that I jist tripled my money on them; but, jumpin' Judas, if I'd only known how valuable they were, I'd never parted with them."

Adam's brow wrinkled with a look of perplexity.

"I guess it's all up then as far as my cash is concerned."

The other gazed at him and remained in deep thought for a few minutes. Then he exclaimed:

"Not by a darned sight, for I can tell you jist what I did with those chairs and then you can follow them up if you want to."

"Do you mean that you keep a record of the things you sell your customers?" interrupted Bobby.

"That's just it," was the calm rejoinder.

"Have you got it with you?"

"I think I have," and Sam Simon put his hand in his hip pocket and brought out a large, greasy-looking memorandum book.

"Sit down, friends," he said, "and I'll see if I can get any trace of the darn things."

They all seated themselves and then the peddler began to go over his accounts with the stolidity and slowness of one who is not very familiar with book-keeping. Page after page was turned over without any apparent results. Ten minutes had elapsed and then as the tall one wet the end of his thumb and turned a fresh page he gave a grunt of satisfaction.

"Here they are, three in a row—just like three peas in a pod—but they're sold

to three different people and they're ten or twenty miles apart."

The man and the boy were very much excited and they leaned over and looked very intently at the penciled columns on the soiled page.

"Suppose I make a note of the three names," said Bobby.

"That's just what you'd better do," was the response.

The boy drew an envelope from his pocket and made a memorandum of what he found in the peddler's book. Then he turned to Adam.

"The first chair was sold to a woman that lives less than a mile from here. I think it would be a good thing to call on her right away."

"You're puffectly right," agreed Sam Simon. "What's worth doin' at all is worth doin' right away."

Bobby turned to the janitor.

"Now, Adam, which chair was it that contained the money?"

The old man scratched his gray hair in perplexity.

"Blamed if I know," he admitted in crestfallen tones. "It was the one that stood near the door."

"Was it different from the others?"

"Nope—they all looked alike."

Once again the three of them joined in a laugh that relieved the strain of the situation.

"I tell you what I'll do," said the peddler rising and putting on his coat, "I'll go there with you and present you to this woman and recommend you to her goodness of heart. Otherwise you may have some trouble. She's one of my best customers and I think she will be willin' to listen to what I've got to say."

Five minutes later, the two men and the boy were out in the roadside walking rapidly in the direction of the outskirts of the town. It did not take them very long to get there. Mrs. Marco, the woman in question, was at home and she invited them into her little sitting room. The tin peddler told the story of the loss of the fortune so vividly and pleaded the cause of the janitor so eloquently, that it melted the heart of the woman at once.

"Of course," said Bobby, "we don't expect to put you to trouble for nothing. We're willing to pay you for that."

Mrs. Marco gave an indignant toss of the head.

"I'd like to know what you take me for. I'm a poor woman myself and I know how to sympathize with the poor. Just tell me what you want to do."

"Well," said Adam timidly, "I'd like to open that chair and look at the stuffin'." If the money's in it, I'd like to have it after I prove that it's mine. If not, all we can do is thank you for your kindness."

She agreed to the plan at once and the black horse-hair chair which occupied a position of honor in the parlor was carried into the back kitchen to be dissected. Adam, who was handy with tools of all kinds, was the chief carpenter. With a little tack hammer and other implements of the upholsterer's trade, he soon had the covering off the chair and in a few minutes they were engaged in searching through the padding and the hair. It was love's labor lost. Nothing was there except the

rusty springs and a lot of excelsior that had been put in for good measure. They thanked Mrs. Marco and started back greatly disappointed.

They left Sam Simon at the door of the White Horse Hotel with a partial promise of meeting him in the morning. After that the janitor turned to Benson with a rather wry face.

"Bobby, let's walk around the town for a few minutes. I've got the blues and don't feel like going home right away."

The boy humored him and it was not long before the old man had recovered his accustomed good nature. It was now quite late and both of them realized the necessity of getting home. On the return trip they passed within a few yards of the hotel. As they did so, the door opened and a flood of light streamed out into the darkened night. Two men appeared at the door. One of them was the tin peddler who called out "Good-night" to his companion and then closed the door.

Bobby gave an exclamation of surprise. In the brief interval when the light from

the doorway had cast its ray on the outside, he had gotten a glimpse of the second man.

He was of medium build and dressed very shabbily. His face had a dead dull whiteness suggestive of prison pallor. He had small, ferret-like, bloodshot eyes with red rims around them. He wore a ragged cap on the back of his closely-cropped hair and there was a leer about his closely-shaven features that gave Bobby an uncomfortable, creepy feeling. He turned to Adam.

"Did you see that man sneak away in the darkness?" he asked.

"No," was the reply. "Who was it?"

"It was the fellow we met in the woods—the tramp that has been prowling around here ever since you lost your fortune."

CHAPTER XVI

BOBBY GETS A LIFT

THE sun was streaming in the windows of his room when Bobby awakened the next morning. It was a cold, crisp day and the bed-clothing felt very warm and cozy. The boy remembered that it was Friday and that both Friday and Saturday of that week were free days at the Bell Haven Academy. With this comforting thought in his mind, he turned over for another nap, but just when he was snugly composed he was aroused by pounding on the door and the voice of the Sleeping Beauty crying:

"Get up, you lazy lunkhead—get up!"

Benson gave a groan of annoyance.

"If I do get up, I'll throw you into the middle of next week."

Forbes replied to this salute by playing a tattoo on the door with his closed fists.

"You're an ungrateful wretch," he ex-

claimed. "Here I've climbed all the way up those crooked stairs of yours to bring you a message and all I get in return is a storm of abuse."

"What's the message?" asked Bobby, becoming interested.

"Oh, nothing," wearily replied the other, "except that Mike Murray is about to hold a meeting in his room for the purpose of making plans for the basketball game with the Williams team next Saturday and he wanted you to be present promptly at nine o'clock."

Benson tossed the covers to one side and jumped out of bed. He threw a bathrobe over his shoulders and then unlocked the door and admitted his friend.

"I owe you an apology, Forbes. I just thought you were trying to have fun with me."

The stout one smiled broadly.

"I thought I was too. It's always worth the price of admission to hear you squeal whenever you have to get out of bed in the morning. It sounds like a pig that's been caught under a gate."

"Do you mean to say that that message isn't on the level," asked Bobby quickly.

"Oh, yes, the message is all right," said the fat boy, "but I always like to combine pleasure with business. Growl a little more for me, won't you?"

Bobby burst out laughing at this witticism on the part of his friend and then said:

"If you'll wait for me I'll be dressed in a jiffy and go down to breakfast with you. Then we can go over to Mike Murray's room together."

It did not take Benson long to get into his clothes, and after that the morning meal was disposed of in double-quick order. The Academy bell was striking nine when the two boys reached the meeting place. Murray was there and so was Pinky Palmer, Gordon Greely and Nelson James. It was the red-haired one who greeted the newcomers.

"Here comes the late Mr. Benson," cried Pinky.

"Yes," chirped in Nelson James, "accompanied by his slothful friend, Mr. John Forbes."

"Boys," said the trainer, breaking in on this repartee, "I called you together to impress upon you the importance of the basketball game which is to be played here on Saturday afternoon. It's the wind-up of the season and the championship lies between the Bell Haven team and the Williams Academy."

"I don't like that," interjected Forbes.

"Why?" asked Murray.

"Because those fellows play dirty ball, and I never could enjoy that form of amusement."

"I don't see that that has anything to do with the case," rejoined the trainer. "Those fellows haven't been disqualified and we've got to meet them. The fact that you don't like them hasn't anything to do with the case, one way or another. We're scheduled to meet them on Saturday and the only question is, how we shall prepare for the battle?"

"That's the sort of spirit to show," cried Pinky Palmer with mock enthusiasm. "We don't care what kind of basketball they play, we're going to make them look

like thirty cents. But if you'd listen to the kind of hot air that Forbes is putting out, you'd think we all had a bad case of cold feet."

"I haven't been letting out any hot air and I haven't cold feet," retorted the Sleeping Beauty, "and if Mr. Pinky Palmer makes any more personal remarks, I'll go over there and put my mark on the tip of his stub nose."

Mike Murray rapped on the table with his fist.

"I want you boys to cut out all that kind of talk," he said sternly. "We haven't any time for monkey business. You can have all of that you like when you leave here, but for the present we want to confine ourselves strictly to basketball."

This rebuke had the desired effect and after that the boys were as grave and attentive as a gathering of college professors.

"One of the best things in basketball," said the veteran coach, "is to surprise the opposition. Now, the biggest surprise you can give the Williams crowd next Saturday

is to use the same set of signals we utilized in the last game with that team. They will take it for granted that we have formed a new set of signals and when you spring the old ones on them they won't exactly know what to make of it. So we'll let it be understood that that part of the game is settled."

"Well, what are we here for?" queried the irrepressible Palmer, who could not remain serious for a very long time.

"I called you together for the purpose of impressing on each one of you the necessity of more accurate work in passing the ball."

"I thought we passed it pretty well," grumbled Forbes.

"So you do," conceded Murray, "but there's lots of room for improvement."

"I suppose that remark applies to every part of our play," suggested Captain Benson.

"Not at all," replied the coach, "I can't say that it does. You've got the other tricks of the game down pretty fine and I believe that if you will practice on your

passing, you will come pretty near to getting away with the championship."

"What would you suggest?" asked Gordon Greely.

"One thing," was the response, "and that is to keep your mind and your eye on the ball. It goes without saying that carefulness and skilfulness in passing are essential in basketball. It is absolutely necessary if you are going to have the right kind of team work. If one of you wants to see the other players on the team go to pieces, make a wild throw. I've seen that thing done so often that I get tired of talking of it. In the last game we had, Palmer threw the ball once without having the slighest idea where it was going. It demoralized the whole bunch."

"How can I avoid that sort of thing?" asked Pinky, looking quite contrite."

"Well, you've got to keep your head. You can make up your mind that a slow pass to a man that's running at full speed is going to fail. On the other hand, if it is a short pass it is foolish to make it too quickly. I've known many a basket to be

lost on a pass that was too swift as well as on one that was too slow."

There was a general discussion, in the course of which it was agreed that overhand passes were the best and that the underhand kind should only be used rarely. The meeting finally adjourned with a very clear understanding of what was expected of every one of the players at the game on the following Saturday. As they filed out of Murray's room, Bobby Benson saw Adam West standing beside the Academy gate. The old man wore such a forlorn look that it touched the boy to the heart. He hurried over in the direction of the venerable one, accompanied by Pinky Palmer.

"Adam," he said impulsively, "I haven't forgotten your matter and I'm going to start out on it right away."

"Well now, son," remonstrated the old man, "I don't expect you to spend all your time looking for my cash. I know you've got other things to take up your busy hours——"

"I haven't anything more important

than your affairs," cut in the boy sharply, "and I want you to understand that."

A grateful smile overspread the countenance of the janitor as he said:

"I'll go and get the wagon and if you're ready to start, I'll take you to the house where that tin peddler sold the second chair."

"And I'll go along with you," chimed in Pinky Palmer. "I'm just feeling ripe for a first-class adventure."

Bobby shook his head.

"I'm afraid we can't work it that way, Pinky," he said.

"Why not?" asked the red-haired one.

"Because somebody's got to stay here and practice with the team. If you go, I'll have to remain at home."

"I never thought of that," exclaimed the impulsive Palmer. "You go ahead and I'll stick by the members of the Bell Haven Five like a porous plaster. In the meantime, I'd like to know when you expect to get back?"

"Oh, I'll be here in time for the game. I may get through by tonight, but if not,

I ought to get home early tomorrow morning."

"Don't you be late," warned Pinky. "The scrap's called for two o'clock sharp and we want you to be on hand to put the old pep into every one of the boys."

"Oh, you needn't let that worry you. I'll be here and I'll be on time. You can take my word for that."

Ten minutes later, Adam had harnessed Maud S. to the old Germantown wagon and with Bobby Benson was starting out on the trail of the second chair. This antique piece of furniture, according to the tin peddler, had been sold at a house along the road, half-way between Cleverly and Hedgewater. As they proceeded on their way, the man and the boy discussed the peculiar incident which they had witnessed the night before at the door of the White Horse Hotel. It had remained fixed in both their minds and the picture of Sam Simon engaged in confidential conversation with the rascally looking tramp was as vivid as the moment it had first flashed before them.

Maud S. was moving along at a jog trot and presently passed the ancient road house. There were no signs of life about the hotel and Adam suggested that it would be a good plan to stop and see the tin peddler. Bobby followed the suggestion, but was informed by the landlord that Sam Simon had left the house about a half hour before.

The journey was resumed and they were making first rate time when suddenly the wheel of the wagon was caught in a deep rut in the road and twisted off its axle. Bobby and Adam, fortunately, both landed on their feet and were uninjured. They looked at one another with chagrin. It was impossible for the wagon to go any further, but at the same time delays were dangerous and the fact of having to give up the journey at this stage was most provoking.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," said the quick-witted Bobby. "I'll make the rest of the journey on foot. The place mustn't be more than a mile from here. In the meantime you'll have to try to get help

and take Maud S. and this wagon back to Bell Haven."

This was no sooner said than it was agreed upon. It was a brisk morning and Benson started off in a cheerful frame of mind. He found the walking very invigorating and before long almost forgot the incident that had compelled him to become a pedestrian. The road was apparently desolated at that time in the morning, but he had not gone more than a half mile when he noticed a white, canvas-covered wagon slowly proceeding ahead of him. There was something familiar about the team and a second glance told him that it was the vehicle belonging to Skinny, the tin peddler. He hastened his steps and in a little while had overtaken the wagon. As he got alongside the horses the driver of the team looked down at him in a quizzical way and then exclaimed:

"By gosh, but I believe that you're the youngster from the Bell Haven Academy."

"You've guessed right," retorted the boy.

"Where are you goin'?"

"I'm making for the house where you said you sold the second chair."

"Jump in then and I'll give you a lift. I'm going in that direction."

After he had been comfortably seated by the side of the driver, Bobby turned to the man and said:

"Mr. Simon, I'm going to be perfectly frank with you. When we were passing the White Horse Hotel last night we saw you talking to a disreputable looking character who seems to be after this money. The business worried Adam a good deal and upset me too. Do you mind if I ask you what you were talking about?"

"Certainly not," was the hearty response. "He came to me for the same reason that you did. He wanted to know what I did with the chairs. He said he was a detective and he showed me his badge, so I told him all about it."

"He's no detective," retorted the boy; "he's a fraud. He's worse than a fraud—he's a rascal."

"Well, well," chuckled the tin peddler, "you can never tell what you're going up

against in these troublesome days. He pulled the wool over my eyes, all right. I'm might sorry I told him anything."

"You're not to blame," consoled the boy, "and I'm mighty glad to hear just what took place. It may be useful to us before we get through with this business."

They proceeded in silence for quite a long while after this. Presently a sudden bend in the road revealed a red house with a hipped roof. Sam Simon, pointing to it with the butt end of his whip, said:

"Do you see that house?"

"I do," replied Benson.

"Well," said the peddler, "that's the place that shelters the second black horse-hair chair."

CHAPTER XVII

THE SECOND CHAIR

As they neared the house with the hipped roof, the tin peddler turned to his boyish companion and said:

"I'm in a big hurry and the best I can do is to introduce you to this man and then leave you to get the chair the best way you can."

"Who is he?" asked Bobby.

"His name is Jacob Yocum. He's a miser and a sort of a hermit, but he has a fad for collecting antique furniture, and that's how he came to buy the chair. He wanted both of them, but it broke his heart to spend the money and so I had to take the third one to a country tavern, about twenty miles from here."

As he spoke, Sam Simon gave Bobby a card on which was inscribed the name and address of the last purchaser of the chair.

"I hope you'll have luck here, but if

you don't, you'll have to take the train for the last place. There's one that leaves about two o'clock in the afternoon, so you can guide yourself accordingly."

By this time the team had pulled up in front of the weather-beaten house and the tin peddler was at the door, thumping on the panels with his spidery hand. He turned to the youngster while he was waiting and said:

"You'll find this fellow a very queer duck. He may not want to give up the chair. You better not tell him there's a fortune in it."

"What would you suggest?"

"Can't suggest a darn thing," was the homely rejoinder. "You'll have to guide yourself according to circumstances, but whatever you do, use strategy, my boy, use strategy."

Presently the door opened on a crack and a little man in his shirt sleeves and without collar or tie peered through the aperture. He recognized the peddler.

"I don't want a thing, I don't want a thing today," and as he repeated this

remark he made as if to close the door. But the tin peddler was too quick for him. He struck his big foot in the doorway and gave him a shove that almost sent him into the bare hallway.

"Here's a young man that wants to buy some furniture from you—treat him well, for he's a very good friend of mine."

Before the man had a chance to say a word, Sam Simon had hurried down the steps, jumped into the wagon and was driving off. He waved his hand in friendly salutation.

"Good-bye, Bobby. Don't forget to take care of yourself."

Bobby smiled in spite of the strangeness of the situation in which he found himself. The colorless little old man had not yet regained his power of speech. The tin peddler, looking back over his shoulder, called to him:

"Don't forget to treat that boy right—he's a very good friend of mine."

As the team passed out of sight Bobby turned to the strange looking person that stood in front of him.

"I didn't get your name," he said sparring for time. "What did you say it was?"

"Jacob Yocum," said the other, peering at him suspiciously from under a pair of faded eyebrows.

"Oh, very well, Mr. Yocum. Suppose we go inside?"

Very reluctantly the other closed the door and led the way into a big, square room which was evidently used at one time for a parlor. Bobby bumped into a walnut whatnot that stood in his pathway and moving aside to get out of its way collided with a bookcase.

"It's very dark in here," he exclaimed, rubbing the bruised portions of his body. "I can't see where I'm going."

The shutters of the room were bowed in and the small amount of light that filtered in through the green blinds failed to relieve the gloom of the room. It cast its feeble rays over a most remarkable collection of antiques. Furniture of every conceivable kind and style filled the place. There were chairs, bureaus, tables, clocks

and kneeling stools. One corner of the room seemed to be set aside for grandfather's clocks. There were tall clocks and small ones; some newly varnished and others apparently in the last stages of their existence. They all ticked, but not in unison, and Bobby thought, as he gazed at these reminders of the past, that he had never before been in the midst of such a queer assemblage of antiques.

The old man looked like a relic himself. He put on a skull cap to protect his bald head from the drafts and this gave him such a sinister appearance that Bobby felt the cold chills running up and down his spinal column, but the sensation only lasted for a moment. He looked at the queer owner of the house and then smiled in a friendly way. The collector of antiques did not return the smile. He rubbed a pair of dirty hands together as though he were washing them in invisible soap and said in a weak, piping voice:

"What kind of furniture did you want to buy?"

The sound of the man's voice reminded

Bobby that the time had come for him to get his wits together. He remembered what Sam Simon had said when they had parted.

"I don't know," he said slowly, "what have you got in old chairs—some old parlor chairs?"

Very laboriously the old man made his way through the mass of furniture that clustered about the room. Presently, after much shoving and pushing of various articles, he came in sight of a lot of old chairs. Some were cane bottom and others wooden and still others plush covered. Bobby scrutinized them carefully, but he did not see the one he was after. He was almost on the point of giving up the search, when he detected a black, horse-hair covered chair wedged in the corner of the room. It was one of the chairs which had stood for so many years in Adam's apartment at Mrs. Bowen's boarding house.

"How about that one?" he said, pointing to the one in question and carefully restraining all evidences of the emotion which he felt.

The old collector, after much difficulty, managed to pull that particular chair from out of its surroundings. Bobby pretended to examine it with the air of a purchaser who is likely to drive a sharp bargain.

"What do you want for it?" he asked finally.

The collector paused for awhile and looked reflectively at his dirty finger-nails. Presently he darted his ferret-like eyes in the boy's direction and said in a whining voice:

"Five dollars," he said, "and it's cheap at the price."

Benson had not considered the fact that he might be called on to pay for the missing chair. However, he had money in his wallet and he recalled the fact that it amounted to fifteen or twenty dollars. Also he decided that it would be wise to pay for the chair if he could not get it in any other way, but it would not do to show too much eagerness.

"Is that chair made of real hair?" he asked with the air of one who has much knowledge on the subject.

"Sure," was the smirking response, "every bit of it's real hair."

"Will you let me open it and see if it contains the genuine article?" asked the boy with a shrewd glance at the man.

"Certainly not," was the indignant response, "what do you take me for, anyhow? I didn't ask you to buy it in the first place."

"I know that, but I think your price is too high."

"It's dirt cheap."

"I don't think so. I'll give you two dollars for the chair and take a chance on it."

The man shook his head.

"All right," concluded Bobby, and he turned on his heel and made as if to leave the room.

The man ran after him.

"I'll give it to you for three dollars and it's a bargain at that price."

Without another word Bobby pulled out his wallet and selecting three one-dollar bills handed them to the dealer in antiques.

"That don't include the delivery," protested the old man. "It'll cost you extra to have it sent home."

The boy smiled.

"There won't have to be any delivery, I'm going to take it with me," and suiting the action to the word, he lifted the chair over his shoulder and marched out of the room into the hallway. Jacob Yocum squeezed past him to open the door. As they paused at the door-step for a moment, the collector of antiques rubbed a dirty hand over an equally dirty face and exclaimed to himself perplexedly:

"I don't understand it. I don't understand it."

"What don't you understand?" demanded Bobby sharply.

The unexpected question roused the old man from his reverie. He gazed at the boy fixedly for some moments and then finally said:

"There was a man here less than an hour ago who wanted to buy the self-same chair you have there."

"He didn't get it though?"

The hermit-collector gave a croak that was intended to be a chuckle.

"It doesn't look like it, does it?"

"No; but why didn't he get it?"

"Pure accident; pure accident," repeated the old fellow. "We went in the front room to get it and couldn't find it. I 'spose it was covered with a lot of rubbish. But when we went in just now, the moving of the other stuff probably shifted it into sight."

"And earned three dollars for you," teased Bobby.

"It's worth twice the money," protested Yocum.

"What did the man look like—the man that wanted to buy the chair?"

The dealer shook his head feebly.

"I'm sure I couldn't describe him. My eyes have been going back on me for a long while. But I can tell you one thing. I didn't like his looks. No, sir, I didn't like his looks and I breathed a sigh of relief when he got out of my house."

The chair on Bobby's shoulder was becoming heavy, and he was getting impa-

tient to examine its contents, so turning to the man he said:

"Good-bye, Mr. Yocum."

The old man nodded a curt farewell and stood at the door looking curiously at the strange boy who had called to make such an unusual purchase. Bobby's heart was beating rapidly as he wondered whether Adam's fortune was in the chair that he was carrying over his shoulder. He made up his mind not to examine his purchase until he was at least out of sight of the collector's house. Also he preferred some sheltered spot where he was not likely to be observed.

He continued down the road for some time until he came to a large barn. It appeared to be vacant and no one was in sight. The boy made his way to the rear of the frame building and put the chair down and prepared to investigate the black horse-hair chair. He had a large jack-knife in his pocket and by means of this was able to rip the cover off the piece of furniture. Then very carefully he pulled out the hair, going through it with the

greatest caution. It was ten minutes before he had completed his very thorough examination. After that he threw himself on the ground with an air of abject discouragement.

And no wonder, for besides the horsehair, the chair contained nothing except a set of rusty and worn-out springs!

CHAPTER XVIII

UNDER THE CIRCUS TENT

BOBBY lay on the ground for some time staring up at the sky and wondering how his adventure was going to end. He knew that everything was staked on the last chair and its contents. Now that he was fairly into the heart of the business he contemplated whether his conduct was not somewhat like that of the famous Don Quixote who won imperishable notoriety, if not fame, by fighting wind-mills.

Down in his heart Bobby realized that the missing money was a case for the police and he half regretted that information concerning the loss had not been immediately sent to the police departments of the various cities in the vicinity of Bell Haven. But his adventure with the truly rural chief of police of the Academy town had dampened his ardor as far as the authorities

were concerned. Besides that, Adam West's request for comparative silence had prevented him from following his own judgment in the matter.

The wind was quite chilly and presently the boy found himself shivering. This was nature's warning and he obeyed it at once by jumping to his feet and proceeding on his journey. He knew in a hazy sort of way that the railroad station was not far off and consulting a time-table he found that the next train to leave there for Hedgewater was due in about an hour. The address of the hotel keeper who had purchased the last chair was at a suburb just outside the big city, and Bobby calculated that he could reach there just in time for supper.

As he sauntered along the roadside, his attention was attracted by the unusual number of people who were attired in holiday costume. He could not understand it. It was a free day at Bell Haven, but that in itself had no relation to state or national holidays. Possibly the occasion was a local one. It was the time for

county fairs and a gathering of that kind might be in progress in the neighborhood. As he strode along, the sound of music was wafted on the autumn air and the next moment a sudden twist in the road revealed to him the cause of the unexpected festivity.

It was a circus—a one-ring circus, to be sure, but at the same time an aggregation of wonders well calculated to draw the elusive dollars from the pockets of the simple country folk. As the boy came nearer the crowd became larger and unconsciously he followed. Presently he came within sight of the main tent, at the entrance of which a barker, standing on an elevated platform, was assuring the people of the unparalleled attractions that lay sheltered beneath the canvas tents. It was Cooper's Consolidated Circus and the lecturer was impressing upon his hearers that nothing like it had ever been seen, or ever would be seen, in that section of the country. He pointed to the opening in the tent with the end of a long cane as he cried out in lusty tones:

"This way in—this way in. Everything's alive on the inside. It's positively the last chance you will have to see such an aggregation of live wonders under the same canvas. See the marvelous polar bear; the only one in captivity since the North Pole was discovered by our old friend Doc Cook; see the educated monkeys whose table manners have been envied by the crowned heads of Europe; see Professor Perkins, the world's strongest man, who lifts a horse and cart with one hand while lighting a Turkish cigarette with the other; see all of these things and a hundred others combined under one management for the small sum of twenty-five cents!"

The crowd on the outside was gradually growing in size and as the speaker continued the semicircle of faces that surrounded his improvised rostrum seemed to be composed wholly of wide-open mouths and bulging eyes. Benson was one of the most thrilled of the listeners. He was still at the age when a circus was an event in his life and he was possessed with a strong desire to go within and view the wonderful

things so eloquently described by the silver-tongued orator.

He had more than an hour to spare and he figured it out that he could see the circus and witness at least part of the performance and still be in time to take the train for Hedgewater. A voice within him seemed to protest against this suggestion. It advised him not to sacrifice duty for the sake of momentary pleasure. He stood there for some moments undecided, but unexpectedly a vision crossed his sight and caused him to end the mental debate in favor of the circus.

The "vision"—if such an unpleasant person could be described by that word—was nothing more or less than the tramp he had first met in the woods and who had since that time been crossing his path at frequent intervals. The man looked very much the same as he had on the first occasion that they met, with one notable exception. His hair was no longer closely cropped. It now presented the other extreme. It was thick and bushy, but even that change did not improve the villainous aspect of its wearer.

The fellow was edging his way towards the window of the ticket wagon when Bobby first noticed him. He looked slightly more prosperous than he had when they met in the woods, but his face still had the dead, dull whiteness that was so suggestive of prison pallor. His small, ferret-like bloodshot eyes with the red rims around them peered furtively from side to side as he made his way into the circus tent. He pulled the peak of his ragged cap down over his eyes, but he still had that leer about his closely-shaven lips which seemed to be a perpetual defiance against law and order.

It did not take Bobby Benson long to decide that it was his duty to follow the evil-looking one. His inclination to go into the circus had been strong enough at the outset, but when the tramp passed beneath the folds of the mysterious caravan, the boy felt fully justified in following him. The man had not bought a reserved seat, so that Benson had very little difficulty in getting close to him. After they were seated Bobby found that the unknown occupied the bench just

below him. They were not more than four or five feet above the ground and within easy distance of the ringside.

It was not many minutes before the performance began and then for a long time Benson found himself absorbed in a series of thrilling acts. It was more like a beautiful dream than a cold reality. The trapeze performers and the bareback riders went through one nerve-racking thing after another until the hair on the heads of the spectators might almost have been described as standing upright with wonder and fright. The boy glanced at the man from time to time, but the atmosphere of the circus had enveloped him and he felt as though he were in another world.

Presently, while the trained monkeys were turning somersaults on the back of a friendly elephant, Bobby felt someone tugging his ankle and calling out in a husky voice:

"Gus, Gus, take this and read it."

The boy looked down and beheld a bleary-eyed individual gesticulating from beneath the seats. The fellow was reach-

ing up with a dirty piece of note paper in his hand. Bobby made as if to take it.

"Not you," cried the stranger, hoarsely. "I want that bloke on the seat next to yours."

The "bloke" in question was none other than the man that Benson had been trailing. He overheard the conversation and without appearing to notice Bobby, he reached down and took the folded paper from the outstretched hand of the other. He bent down and read it and as he did so a look of fear came into the ferret-like eyes. He glanced neither to the right nor to the left, but with a grunt of anger he got up and squeezed his way through the crowd, paying no attention to the exclamations of annoyance that greeted him on every side. As he left his place in the circus, he started to thrust the mysterious note in his trouser pockets, but he missed his aim and the piece of soiled paper fell on the seat he had just left. Involuntarily Bobby reached over and picked it up. He opened it and read the scrawling handwriting:

Get out of here as quick as you can.
The coppers are on your trail.

It had been part of Benson's hazily defined plans to communicate with the authorities. He felt that the villainous looking man was somehow or other connected with the disappearance of Adam's money. The only thing that made him hesitate was the lack of evidence against the fellow, but after reading the tell-tale note, he realized that the time had come for prompt action. He arose and started after the departing man, but unfortunately the other had too good a lead, and long before Benson had reached the exit, his quarry had been swallowed up by the crowd. Once outside, the boy made every effort to locate the man, but in vain. He was bitterly blaming himself for his incompetence when his attention was directed by a poster on an adjoining fence. It was printed in large black letters and it read:

$100.00 REWARD!

The above amount will be paid for any information that will lead to the arrest of

> Gus Miles, alias the Weasel, alias the Fox, who escaped from the Hedgewater jail on October the 4th, last, and who has since been perpetrating robberies in and about Bell Haven, Cleverly and Hedgewater.
>
> He is of medium build, smooth shaven with a receding forehead, a wart on his upper lip and small grayish eyes. When last seen he wore a brown cap and was shabbily dressed. Any person having information concerning this convict should communicate at once with the Chief of Police of Hedgewater.

The boy stood looking at this notice for some moments. The mystery of the strange man was explained at last. The dead, dull whiteness of his face was suggestive enough in view of these facts. He was an escaped convict and apparently a man with a bad record. Rapidly Bobby made a mental review of his meetings with this dangerous character. First of all came the chance encounter in the woods and after that he recalled the evil looking eyes of the criminal as he had peered into the sitting room of Mrs. Bowen's boarding house while

Adam was detailing the story of the lost money.

Instinctively the boy wondered whether the "Weasel" had secured the much-coveted bank notes. Undoubtedly he had overheard and understood their conversation and was on the trail of the lost cash. Miles was surely the man who had called on Sam Simon at the White Horse Hotel and must also have been the man who was looking for the second chair in the house of the antique dealer. There was only one more place to go. Had he been there? That was the burning question which the boy was unable to answer. The thing for him to do under the circumstances was to hurry to the tavern on the outskirts of Hedgewater and if possible get possession of the third chair.

He hastened to the railroad station. As he neared it he could hear the ringing of the bell and the puffing of the locomotive. He went to the station window and purchased a ticket and then hurried to the platform.

But he was too late! The train had

already pulled out and Bobby's heart sank as he gave a discouraged glance at the retreating cars.

CHAPTER XIX

THE THIRD CHAIR

THERE are periods in the lives of every person when time moves with leaden heels. Such an interval now came to Bobby Benson. He learned that the next train for Hedgewater was due in an hour, but the prospect of having to wait for sixty whole minutes was, in his state of mind, almost unbearable. He paced up and down the platform as though he were distracted. Not once, but three separate times, he asked the ticket agent if there was any possibility of the train coming any earlier, and he kept up his inquiries so persistently that the railroad man finally pulled down his window with a bang, saying as he did so:

"You're a pest—get away from here."

Bobby was not in the least affected by this rebuke. He ran his fingers through his hair and continued walking up and

down the platform. He could not remember having been so greatly excited since his arrival at Bell Haven. He imagined that under the drilling of Mike Murray and the discipline which prevailed at the Academy that he had thoroughly learned the lesson of self-control. It seemed, however, that this was a mistake and that under the stress of unusual emotion he was likely to lose command of himself. This thought had the effect of partly bringing him to his senses, and he resolutely seated himself on a bench in the station and made up his mind to stay there until the train arrived.

It did arrive presently, as all things in life must arrive if we only have the patience to wait for them. He took a seat in the car and began to calculate how long it would take before they reached Hedgewater. The conductor came along to collect the tickets in a little while and then to his great chagrin Bobby learned that the train was an accommodation that stopped at every way station. It was a great disappointment, but he made up his

mind that he would have to reconcile himself to the situation. He began to plan the moves that he would make after he reached his destination. Incidentally he reviewed all of the events that had taken place since Adam first received the letter announcing the fortune. Nothing had seemed to go right. One difficulty followed another in such quick succession that it seemed almost hopeless to expect a happy solution.

While Bobby was thinking of these things he felt someone slapping him on the shoulder, and looking around at the rear seat he found himself gazing into the bucolic countenance of his old friend, the Chief of Police of Bell Haven. The minion of the law was smiling broadly and seemed to be delighted at having met the boy. Benson, however, found himself unable to reciprocate. Indeed, the sight of the man irritated him and seemed to bring back all of the disappointment that had been experienced since the money was first carried away in the old chairs.

"Hello, bub," said the Chief, rubbing

the end of his nose with his broad palm. "Ain't you glad to see your old college mate?"

"Can't say that I am," retorted the boy crossly as he moved around and gazed out of the window.

This unexpected greeting, however, did not dampen the cordial manner of the village police officer. He calmly arose and stepping forward took the seat by the side of the petulant boy.

"I s'pose you're cross because I didn't start out on a will-o'-the-wisp chase after an imaginary fortune."

"That's just it," replied the boy hotly. "I don't think you know your business."

The chief smiled broadly and wiped his ruddy lips before replying. Then he said in a tone of extreme satisfaction:

"Son, when you get older you're likely to have more sense than you've got now. I didn't go on your crazy, wild-goose chase because you didn't have a thing to work on, but I'll give you a quiet tip."

"What is it?"

"It's this. I'm on one of the biggest

cases we ever had in this vicinity. There's an escaped convict in this neck of woods and the Hedgewater people have offered a hundred dollars reward for any information leading to his recapture."

"What's his name?" asked the boy crossly.

"His name," said the conceited one, "is Gus Miles, alias the Weasel, and I can tell you that he's one of the smartest chaps that ever attempted to do business in my bailiwick."

Bobby burst into a fit of uncontrollable laughter.

"What's the matter, son?" asked the other. "Do you see anything humorous in my remarks?"

"I should say so," said the boy. "It's the funniest thing I've listened to in many a long day."

"Where does the joke come in?" persisted the other.

"The joke comes in on you," was the retort. "Gus Miles is the very man I wanted you to follow. He's mixed up in this chair business and with the loss of

Adam's fortune. He didn't steal the money, but he's part of the puzzle just now. You wouldn't listen to me when I was trying to tell you about it. If you had you might have caught this fellow and had him under lock and key by this time."

The officer's face was a study in emotions. It expressed surprise, incredulity and wonderment.

"By heck," he exclaimed finally, "do you mean to tell me that this is the same fellow?"

"It's just what I mean to tell you," said Bobby, "and now if you'll let me alone, I'd like to take a nap."

The Chief of Police was more than willing to let the boy doze away while he resumed his own seat and tried to absorb the information that had just been given him.

It was dusk when the train finally reached Hedgewater and Bobby discovered, as he had expected, that it would be necessary to take a trolley car in order to reach the suburban town of Clayville where the Black Bear Inn was located. At this rural

hotel the boy expected to locate the last of the three chairs that had been sold by Mrs. Bowen to Skinny, the tin peddler.

Benson had no desire to remain in the company of the Chief of Police of Bell Haven any longer than it was necessary, and as the crowd streamed out of the station, he made it a point to slip away from the officer and go his own way. The trolley cars ran to Clayville every twenty minutes and Bobby was fortunate enough to reach the starting point just as the car was preparing to leave.

It was quite dark when he reached Clayville and he discovered that he was not only tired but very hungry. He had had nothing to eat since breakfast time and before he entered the doors of the Black Bear Inn he had made up his mind to get supper there and stay for the night, returning to Bell Haven as early as possible the next morning. The landlord of the hotel, whom he had met the year he was captain of the Bell Haven baseball team, greeted him kindly and showed an interest in his welfare. Bobby assured

him that his most pressing need was a good hot supper and after that he would be glad to discuss a matter of business that had brought him some forty miles from Bell Haven.

After the boy had finished a very appetizing country meal, he rejoined the landlord in the office of the hotel.

"How do you find business?" he asked by way of opening the conversation.

"Oh, pretty good," was the reply.

"Have you been doing any refurnishing lately?"

The landlord shook his head.

"Nope, but I buy an odd piece of furniture now and then."

Bobby turned to him quickly.

"That's just what I wanted to ask you about. Did you purchase an old black horse-hair chair from a tin peddler some time ago?"

"Sure I did."

"Would—would you like to sell it to me if I pay you a fair price?"

"Say," said the landlord with a glint of suspicion in his eyes, "what's coming

over people lately? You're the second fellow today that wanted to buy that broken-down chair. I sold it to the first lunatic that came along and he seemed to be tickled to death over it."

"Who is it? What was it? Please tell me about it?" exclaimed Bobby, the words tumbling over one another as he gripped the landlord's arm excitedly.

"Hold your horses," was the genial reply, "and give me time to get my breath. The fellow that bought the chair is as crazy as a loon. At least, that's my opinion. He took the old thing and ripped it apart and now the legs and the coverin' and the stuffin' are all out there on the junk heap."

Bobby's face grew white with excitement. His eyes were beginning to dance.

"Has—has the man gone away yet?" he asked in a tone that trembled in spite of himself.

"He's still here and I wouldn't be surprised if he came to me after awhile and wanted to buy the roof off the house."

"Where is he?"

"He's up in room 13, but I think he ought to be in a padded cell."

Ten minutes later, Bobby was creeping up stairs in the direction of room No. 13. He located it without difficulty and by the light that streamed through the transom, he rightly guessed that it was occupied. Making his way quietly until he was directly in front of the door, he went down on one knee and peered through the keyhole. What he saw gave him a shock that almost caused him to shriek with excitement.

Gus Miles was seated in front of a little table calmly counting the hundred-dollar bills that Adam West had so foolishly concealed in the third black horse-hair chair.

CHAPTER XX

A FIGHT FOR A FORTUNE

BOBBY BENSON straightened to his full height and then stood for a moment, irresolute, in the hallway. His brain was in a whirl, but instinctively he turned and ran down the stairway. It would be necessary to confide in the landlord. He would tell him the whole story and get him to assist in the capture of the Weasel and thus aid the cause of justice while recovering Adam West's money.

He went pell-mell along the narrow way, two steps at a time. He reached the office panting and out of breath, but prepared to gasp his story to the astonished landlord. But the man was not there. He had evidently been called from his usual post behind the desk. Somehow the little cubby-hole where the host was accustomed to stand seemed strangely desolate.

The register was on the counter and the board filled with room keys stared the excited boy in the face. But that was all. He looked around the room. No one was in sight.

For the moment he was nonplussed and then, impulsively, he leaned over and beat a tattoo on the little silver bell on the desk. It jingled confusedly, but there was no response. To all intents and purposes it was an abandoned inn. Every second counted now and the seconds were fleeing with the speed of the winds. Frantically Bobby rushed through the door and out on the porch. A country lout was watering a horse at the trough. Benson called to him loudly:

"Hey, there, I want to see you."

The frowzy-haired attendant looked up indifferently. Apparently he was uncertain whether he should answer the call. But presently he shuffled over with his hands in his pockets and vacancy in his face.

"What is it?" he drawled.

"I want the boss—the head of this shack," exclaimed Benson.

The gawky one grinned.

"Well, get him—nobody's stoppin' yer."

"But I can't find him. He's not in the office and I don't see him out here."

The boy ran a weather-beaten hand through his shock of straw-colored hair and said with a grin:

"Don't blame me—I'm not his keeper."

This ill-timed humor irritated Bobby beyond endurance. His impulse was to punch the head of the amateur humorist, but he resisted the desire and said as calmly as possible:

"I'd give a good deal to find him—can't you get him for me?"

But the non-appreciation of his wit had soured the lout and he turned sulkily away.

"Don't bother me—I'm busy."

Bobby was ready to grasp at straws now. The thought of permitting Gus Miles to slip through his fingers was exasperating.

"You'll do," he cried to the departing youth. "I may need help. Come with me."

But the other shook his head sulkily.

"I'm workin' in the stable; I haven't got anything to do with the house."

Benson was afraid to linger any longer. He turned to go back into the house and as he did so he called out:

"Hey, there—get a policeman—get anybody—and send them up to room 13 right away."

The frowzy-haired one paused for a moment and looked in the direction of the excited youngster and after Bobby had gone into the house lifted his hand and tapped his forehead significantly.

"Nobody home," he said to himself; "poor boob, nobody home."

By this time Benson had gone up the stairway again and reached the second-story landing. He tip-toed quietly in the direction of the guilty room and stooping down he peered into the keyhole for the second time. Gus Miles was donning his coat. A battered gripsack lay on the floor beside him. It was evident that he was preparing for flight. Whatever was done would have to be done immediately. Otherwise the rascal would escape and Adam's fortune would disappear—probably forever.

Standing there in the darkened hallway

the boy endeavored to come to a decision. He did not fear the convict, but he had wholesome doubts about his ability to deal with him single-handed. What should he do? Should he quit altogether and go back to Bell Haven and confess that the job was too big for him? Should he wait for help, even at the risk of losing his prisoner? Finally, should he take chances and face the Weasel alone?

The first suggestion he dismissed immediately. It would be rank cowardice to give up in the face of a possible battle. Besides he thought, with a whimsical mental twist, that would make him a quitter. He knew very well that when he first entered the Bell Haven Academy he was only too ready to give up his tasks before they were finished. This was a task too, even though it were bigger than anything he had ever undertaken. The second proposition he set aside as impracticable. The denseness of the stable boy made it highly improbable that he would ever respond to his frantic calls for help. He could not tell, either, when the landlord would return.

So the mental debate finally resolved itself into a question of whether he should face Miles alone and take the consequences.

It spoke well for his determination as well as his courage that he decided to do this. Having made this decision, he felt that the sooner it was carried out the better it would be for all concerned. He tapped on the door. There was a shuffling noise from within and Bobby instinctively thought that the escaped convict was putting himself on the defensive. Several moments passed without any response and Bobby knocked a second time. A weak, womanish voice cried:

"What do you want?"

"I want to see you on a matter of business," was the firm reply.

The door opened and the boy walked in. He saw now that the only light in the apartment came from a long tallow candle that was stuck in a bracket on the side of the wall. There were gas fixtures in the room, so that Bobby surmised that the lighting apparatus was temporarily out of commission. The place was scantily fur-

nished and the Weasel in taking it had apparently selected one of the cheapest rooms in the house. A table, a low iron bedstead and two chairs included all of the furnishings.

The boy turned from his quick survey of the apartment to the man himself. He was of medium build and there was something akin to fear in his small, ferret-like, bloodshot eyes with their red rims. The dull white pallor of his face did not serve to increase his beauty. While he gazed at the boy, the glance of terror in his eyes changed to one that closely resembled desperation.

Bobby stood up straight and defiant. He realized that he had deliberately walked into the lion's den and it would not do to show the slightest trace of uneasiness. He was a big, well-formed lad and had the appearance of a boy who is able to take care of himself. Unconsciously he took off his cap and ran his fingers through his thick brown hair and gazed at the derelict before him with a frank, straightforward expression. It was Miles who broke the silence.

"Well," he said with his churlish, feminine voice, "what do you want—what do you mean by coming here and disturbing a respectable citizen?"

"I want that money," said the boy, his voice growing louder and firmer, and uttering each word with deliberate slowness.

"What money?"

"You know well enough. The money you've got in your pocket. The money belonging to Adam West."

The Weasel gave a shrill laugh.

"You must be dreaming. You're talkin' in your sleep. I never heard of Adam West and I never saw you before."

"Yes, you did," said Bobby raising his hand in a threatening way. "You met me in the woods several months ago. You remember it very well. I gave you something to eat and I took up a collection to get you some money to help you out and this is the return I get for it. You're an ungrateful dog and if you don't give me that money right away you'll be sorry for it."

The other looked at him in a glaring manner.

"I'd be twice as sorry if I gave any of my money to a whipper-snapper like you. What do you mean by coming into the room like this and insulting me? Do you think I'm going to stand for your threats? If you don't get out of here in double-quick order, I'll call for the landlord."

Bobby's eyes brightened.

"All right. That'll suit me to a T. I'll open the door so that he can hear you," and as he spoke he made a move towards the door as if to carry out his promise.

"Stop that!" shrieked the other. "If you try any of your blamed nonsense with me, you'll get something you won't like."

Bobby's courage had been mounting higher with each moment of this dialogue. He knew very well that he should have to act promptly and fearlessly. He advanced toward the Weasel in a threatening manner.

"Give me that money," he shouted, "and give it to me right away."

The convict gave him a shove that sent

him into a corner of the room and Bobby, turning, made a dash for the fellow, but before he had proceeded more than two or three steps, the Weasel put his hand into his hip pocket and pulled out a pistol.

"You bloody fool," he gasped hoarsely, "if you put a hand on me, I'll shoot you like a dog."

Benson halted. The sight of the weapon put a wholesome fear in his heart. He felt a creepy feeling and a suspicious shaking of the knees. He had not counted on anything like this. Slowly he moved backward and as he did so his hand came in contact with the table. A moment later and he found himself clutching a heavy tumbler that lay on the top of the table. His dread now was that the fellow might shoot him anyhow. He was desperate and looked as if he held life lightly. It was this thought, as well as a rising sense of rage, that caused the boy to pick up the glass and hurl it with all of his strength at the sinister-looking person.

The missile went its way swiftly and

unerringly. Impulsively the Weasel ducked and the tumbler went over his head, striking the candle in its bracket and snuffed it out. At the same moment there was the crack of a pistol shot and something grazed the right side of Benson's head. He heard its hissing sound and almost simultaneously felt a stinging sensation on the side of the head. There was dead silence after this exciting incident, and the boy and the man stood there in the darkened room.

Something prompted Bobby to quietly drop to the floor and then on his hands and knees he slowly crept to a corner of the apartment. He scarcely trusted himself to breathe, but amid the awful silence he heard the panting of the man who had tried to kill him. He felt that his safety for the time being depended on perfect quiet. Presently his antagonist spoke. Again it was in that whining feminine voice. The boy could not help thinking, even in that perilous moment, of how strange it was to hear a man with a woman's voice.

"If you promise to quit," it said, "I'll let you alone."

The sound was a signal for the boy. He raised himself slightly and made a rush in the direction of the voice. Reaching out savagely he clutched a pair of legs and giving them a sudden yank, threw the man violently on the floor. The next moment they were rolling over one another and fighting like a pair of wildcats. Bobby received a punch in the eye and then a scratch on the cheek, but in return he gave his opponent two of three well-directed blows on the nose. Neither of them knew precisely how they had become separated, but in a few moments they were standing on opposite sides of the room, panting for breath. The next thing Bobby heard was the scratching of a match and almost before he realized what was going on, Miles had relighted the candle. The dim light cast a dull glare over the disordered room. Both of them saw the pistol in the middle of the floor at the same moment and each made a dash for it. Miles was the first to reach it and as

he grabbed the weapon he turned to the boy with an ugly sneer.

"I've got the drop on you again and I've got a good mind to finish you."

Bobby was still defiant, but he felt a sinking sensation in the region of the heart. He was sure that his face was colorless. He knew only too well that his lips were quivering. He wondered in a vague sort of way whether his life was to be ended in this ignominious manner. His impulse was to cry out, but for some unexplainable reason his voice did not respond. It seemed like some horrible dream in which he had been stricken speechless.

He wondered hazily why no one had come to his assistance. The racket, it seemed to him, was sufficient to rouse everybody in the house. Could it be possible that he was going to be left alone to perish. A lump rose in his throat and he swallowed hard two or three times. After that he heard the weak voice of Miles saying:

"If you're ready to call it quits, I'll leave you alone. But you've got to prom-

ise that you won't move or say a word until I get out of the house. Do you promise?"

Bobby's muscles twitched for a moment and then he found himself framing one short word.

"No!" he cried defiantly.

It was scarcely out of his mouth when the criminal, with an imprecation of rage, grasped his pistol by the muzzle and hurled it with all his force at the boy. It struck him somewhere in the pit of the stomach. He felt a terrible pain. After that the room began to whirl and in a subconscious sort of way he felt himself crumple up and fall in a heap on the floor.

CHAPTER XXI

ANXIETY AT BELL HAVEN

TWO hours after Bobby Benson started on his curious mission Pinky Palmer issued a call to the members of the Bell Haven Five for the practice hour in the Academy gymnasium. This call included not only the members of the regular team but also the substitutes, and when the play began there were nine of them in the cage. Before the scrimmage began, the red-haired one turned to his companions and said:

"Now, boys, go to it as if you were in earnest—don't be afraid of spoiling your manly beauty."

"When are we going to start?" asked Nelson James.

"Right now," responded the acting captain. "You can't begin a good thing too soon."

"But where's Benson?" queried the

Sleeping Beauty. "Surely you're not going to go ahead without the captain of the team."

"Benson's been called away on important business," said Pinky with an unusual assumption of dignity, "and I've been told to take his place."

"Where's he gone?" asked Forbes.

"I don't know—exactly."

"When will he be back?" persisted the stout boy.

"When he gets here."

"See here, Palmer," exclaimed Forbes, "I don't want you to get off any fresh talk like that."

Pinky grinned.

"And I don't want you to keep firing a lot of silly questions at me. You better look in the encyclopedia. You're worse than an old woman."

"No, I'm not. I just asked you a civil question."

The temporary head of the team winked at his friend.

"You know what the proverb says?"

"No;" mimicked the other, "what does the proverb say?"

"Simply that a fool can ask more questions in a minute than a wise man can answer in an hour."

"Do you mean to intimate that I'm a fool?" cried the Sleeping Beauty, advancing towards his chum in a menacing way. "Because if you do——"

The shrill shriek of the whistle interrupted the half-finished sentence and Mike Murray, the trainer of the Academy, walked into view. He caught the last few words and had sized up the situation in his shrewd way.

"You boys," he remarked with a smile that puckered up the corners of his eyes, "seem to think that this meeting was called for the purpose of staging a prize fight. You're mistaken. We're here to practice basketball. Pinky Palmer is to be captain for the time being and I would suggest that you get into action at once."

All traces of insubordination disappeared at the sound of the trainer's voice. In a few minutes the boys were working with a will. Pinky stood in the middle of the court and issued orders with the confidence

and rapidity of a field marshal. The players responded quickly and intelligently and the significant gleam in Mike Murray's bright eyes proved that he was thoroughly satisfied with the showing they were making. The three Brill brothers had been called in to take part in the practice and they distinguished themselves, one after another, with some rapid-fire dribbling. Tony Brill was the best of the three, and his work was so clever that Palmer involuntarily exclaimed:

"Say, Tony, I'm awfully sorry you're not on the regular team. I'm sure you'd make good."

"Well," was the snappy rejoinder, "why don't you see that I'm on in the next game?"

"I can't do that, you know," said Pinky lamely. "The only way a substitute can get in a scheduled game is by the withdrawal or injury of one of the regular players."

"Well, withdraw then," teased Brill.

"No, I can't do that, even to satisfy you," laughed the red-haired one, "but I

might happen to twist my ankle or something like that and then you'd have a chance for your white alley."

Tony grinned, displaying a set of pearly teeth.

"I don't wish you any harm, Pinky," he retorted, "but I hope that you may have a slight accident—not enough to hurt you much—so that I can distinguish myself and get my mug in the sporting columns."

It was time to start in again and the boyish repartee ceased. For the next ten minutes the members of the team divided themselves into rival camps and indulged in a genuine scrimmage. It was rough and tumble without much regard for bumps or bruised shins. After that there was some practice in passing the ball. During the most exciting part of this the Sleeping Beauty tried to block a throw that was being made by Nelson James and failed.

"That was very punk," ejaculated the trainer.

"Why was it?" wailed Forbes who was inwardly incensed at himself.

"Because you had a right to get the ball and you could have had it if you'd started soon enough."

"But I didn't know that he was going to throw it in the direction that he did. How could I tell?"

Murray smiled.

"It's plain enough. All you have to do is to watch the other fellow's eye—you know in this game he always looks where he intends to throw."

"I never thought of that, but I'm going to keep it in my noodle when I get into the regular game."

"That's the proper spirit," rejoined Murray, "and I'll give you another pointer that you should have known long ago, and that is always look to see whether the man on the other side is left-handed or not. It's by keeping little things of this kind in your mind that you get the best of the opposition."

After the practice was over the boys indulged in the luxury of a shower bath. Luncheon was served promptly at twelve o'clock and after a brief rest Pinky lined

up his men and took them out for a long walk in the country. They wore caps and sweaters and at Pinky's suggestion used their gymnasium shoes. The return stroll was by way of the river bank, and when they were within a mile of home they broke into a dog trot and kept this up until they reached the Academy. Every one of them felt fine after this moderate exercise in the open air. As he dismissed them for the day, the red-haired one smiled broadly.

"Fellows, if you keep this thing up we'll be as hard as nails and we'll beat Williams or any other team that comes along in any game that they want to play."

As the group was dispersing, the Sleeping Beauty edged up to Palmer and said quietly:

"See here, Pinky, I really want to know about Bobby Benson. What's the matter with him? He isn't sick, is he?"

Palmer shook his head.

"No," he replied, "but if you'll drop into my room tonight, I'll tell you all about it."

"Shall I bring the fellows with me?"

"Sure, there's no use making a mystery of it. Besides, if the fellows know just what's at stake, they're likely to do better work tomorrow."

After supper that night, Pinky learned that Adam West had returned to Bell Haven with a broken-down wagon. No one seemed to know just what was the matter, but from what the boy could gather, there had been an accident and no one was hurt. He tried to get some details from Mrs. Bowen, but while that amiable woman talked a great deal and shed a few tears, she was unable to throw any light upon the situation. The one fact that she reiterated was that Adam was well and that Bobby was in the best of condition. She added that the janitor had left a few minutes after his return, saying that he had pressing business with Benson which would admit of no delay.

Pinky Palmer started for his room shortly before eight o'clock and was startled by hysterical shrieks from his apartment. He hurried there, his heart beating rapidly, and was greatly relieved to find that the

sound came from Tramp, the yellow dog, who served as a mascot of the Bell Haven Academy.

Once in the room the homely animal pranced about the boy, licked his hands, wagged his stumpy tail and showed other evidences of canine emotion.

"You get right back to your box and stay there," ordered Palmer.

Tramp looked up at him with submissive eyes and then obeyed the order of his master. But he did not remain quiet very long. He scratched the side of the box with his paws and a minute later had jumped out of his resting place, and was barking shrilly at the red-haired one.

"I don't know what in the world's the matter with you," said the boy, "but if you keep on in this style, you won't get any marks for good conduct this month."

Tramp whined once or twice as if by this means he might show his dog-like appreciation of the jest, but he looked so mournful and acted in such an unusual manner that it disturbed Palmer. Presently a light dawned on the boy's mind, and he turned

to the four-footed one and said impulsively:

"I believe you're worried about Bobby Benson. Maybe you're homesick for a sight of him. Maybe you think he's in danger, but it's all right, Tramp, old fellow. He'll be here late tonight or tomorrow and you can be happy again."

This assurance seemed to satisfy the uneasy dog. He may not have been acquainted with the niceties of the English language, but there was something about Pinky Palmer's voice that soothed him and induced him to curl up and go to sleep in his home-made bed.

An hour later the Sleeping Beauty and the other boys came piling into the little apartment. After the usual boisterous greetings the stout one turned to Palmer and said:

"Pinky, the other fellows have been asking me questions about Bobby Benson and I haven't been able to answer 'em. Now tell us all about it and relieve this killing suspense."

Thus implored, Pinky proceeded to share

his secret with the others. He briefly sketched the early part of the business for those who were not acquainted with the details of Adam's fortune. After that he proceeded to tell them of the selling of the three chairs and concluded with the recital of how Benson had started out in an endeavor to recover the missing fortune. The boys listened to this with eager interest. Indeed, they absorbed every bit of it as greedily as a starving man would consume food. There was silence which, during the most thrilling part of the recital, was broken only by the ticking of the clock that stood on the mantel-piece. After the tale had been told, Forbes turned to Palmer with an anxious look on his face.

"I don't know how you feel about it, Pinky, but it strikes me that Benson is out on dangerous business."

There was further silence for awhile and then the red-haired one, biting nervously at his finger nails, said:

"You're absolutely right, Forbsey, and I'm feeling just as anxious as a cat that's lost its supper."

"Why didn't someone go with him?" demanded Gordon Greely.

"He wouldn't stand for it," explained Palmer. "I offered to go along and he asked me to stay and help you fellows to do a little practicing."

It was a subdued crowd of boys that finally separated late that night. They kept on the lookout for the boy, but when twelve o'clock came and the boy had not arrived, they gave up hope of seeing him until morning. Saturday dawned clear and cold and all of the pupils were on edge in anticipation of the great basketball game that was scheduled for two o'clock in the afternoon. After breakfast the team indulged in a short practice in the cage. It was ten o'clock and still Bobby Benson had not made his appearance. His prolonged absence was beginning to affect those who expected to play in the big game. They realized that his leadership was almost essential to their success.

Lunch time arrived, but no Benson. Pinky Palmer and Forbes had a bad case of the fidgets. It was decided that they

should go over to the cage at one o'clock in order to indulge in preliminary practice. When the time arrived, the boys of the team appeared in Palmer's room. They were hoping against hope that Bobby Benson would be there. Indeed, Forbes, with a poor assumption of indifference, said:

"Where's Benson?"

Pinky stared at the back of his hand for some moments before he replied:

"I don't know. I guess he's going to be late."

"You'd better name some fellow to take his place in case he's not there when the whistle blows," suggested the Sleeping Beauty in an uncertain voice.

"All right," replied Palmer, pressing his lips tightly together. "I'll name Tony Brill."

And with that the boys started for the gymnasium, their hearts very heavy and their minds filled with conflicting and uncomfortable thoughts.

CHAPTER XXII

A HEART-BREAKING GAME

THE seating capacity of the Bell Haven gymnasium had been enlarged in order to furnish accommodation for the unusually large number of persons who desired to attend the final basketball game of the season, but in spite of that the place was filled long before the whistle blew and quite a number were compelled to stand in the aisles and around the sides of the cage.

It was a notable audience in more ways than one. The pluck and aggressiveness of the Bell Haven boys had won for them a reputation which extended for many miles in that part of the country. The pupils were there as a matter of course and they began to root for their favorites long before the players entered the cage. The faculty of the Academy also graced the occasion with their presence. Dr. Maury, the

principal, came early, accompanied by Tiberius Brown, who gazed on the crowd with a look of almost childish awe not unmixed with admiration for the boys whose prowess was sufficient to attract such an unusual assemblage.

Prominent residents of Bell Haven, Cleverly and Burlingham helped to swell the attendance. The Williams players were accompanied by half a carload of enthusiastic rooters, who occupied one section of the gymnasium. They carried brown pennants with the word Williams on them. They waved these signals on the slightest provocation and kept up such a din and roar that unsuspecting listeners might have imagined that there were five hundred instead of fifty shouters from the classic shades of the Williams Academy.

Finally a number of distinguished patrons gave a note of dignity to the occasion by their presence. One of these was General James, who had taken such a genuine interest in the athletics of the Bell Haven Academy, and whose generosity had not only fitted up the boat-house for the boys,

but had also furnished them with the trophy which they won so gloriously from the Cleverly boat club.

But there was one conspicuous absentee in the throng that had gathered for the purpose of applauding the athletes. It was no less a person than Adam West, the janitor and man of all work at the Academy. His peculiar intimacy with the boys who formed the basketball team and his loyal support of all the athletic events, made his failure to appear seem singularly strange. Mrs. Bowen, his landlady, occupied a favored seat and when she was asked whether the aged one was ill, replied sharply:

"No, he's just as hearty as he can be, but I haven't the slightest idea of what's become of him today. There's no accounting for what that man will do. He's a law all to himself."

At ten minutes of two the place was so densely crowded that it did not seem possible for another person to get inside. Every face was filled with eager anticipation and there was a tenseness about the audience

which indicated the importance of the game it was about to witness. Dr. Maury, usually placid and self-contained, did not escape the prevailing restlessness. A few minutes before the time scheduled for the game to begin, he got up from his seat and went to the dressing room of the Bell Haven Five. The boys were walking about impatiently, waiting for the signal that was to summon them to the cage. Dr. Maury's entrance served to relieve the stress of the moment. He was greeted with shouts of satisfaction. He smiled and saluted the boys and then carefully scrutinized each of them in turn.

"I hope you're all feeling fit," he cried. "I want you to win today. If you don't I'll feel ten times as bad as if you had fallen down in your Greek."

Bursts of laughter followed this remark and while it was going on the principal took a second survey of the team. There was a look of perplexity in his face and he scratched his head as he said:

"Where's Benson? I don't see him. He ought to be lined up with you boys."

"He's not here," exclaimed Pinky Palmer. "He had to go away on a matter of importance."

The Doctor looked his surprise.

"I hope there's nothing wrong at his home. When was he called away?"

"Yesterday, but it wasn't from his home. It's merely a matter that concerns someone in Bell Haven."

The Doctor's usual self-control gave way. He stamped his foot on the floor impatiently.

"I'm surprised at Benson. There isn't anything more important than this basketball game this afternoon and I can't understand why he should go away and leave you boys in the lurch."

This suggestion of Bobby Benson's disloyalty was too much for his warm-hearted friend. He threw precaution to the winds and turning to the irritated principal remarked quietly:

"He went away in a good cause and now that the subject's been brought up I'll have to tell you all about it in a few words. He left here to serve Adam West——"

"Adam West—Adam West," repeated the Doctor. "How in the world could he serve Adam West by running away from his teammates?"

After that there was nothing left to do but to give a detailed report of how the janitor had lost his fortune and how Bobby had gone in quest of the chairs which were supposed to contain the twelve greenbacks. Dr. Maury listened in silence and at the conclusion of the narrative remarked:

"I don't suppose there's any use in crying over spilt milk, but I'm very sorry to hear that this thing's happened. Adam West is very much to blame. I advised him to put that money in a bond or to take some other means of protecting himself from a loss, but he was too obstinate and pig-headed to take my advice and now he'll have to suffer the consequences. It was very chivalrous for young Benson to turn in and help him, but I think he owed a duty to you boys as well as to West. He shouldn't have left here on the eve of an important game."

"But, Doctor," protested Pinky, his eyes

dancing and his arms swinging, "he never dreamt that this adventure would interfere with the basketball game. When he left here yesterday morning he was positive that he would be back in Bell Haven by breakfast time at least. He'd never left us in the lurch intentionally. He's not that kind of a hairpin."

The Doctor smiled at these homely words. "I guess you're right, Palmer; but still I feel very sorry that he didn't consult me before he went away."

"You might have stopped him," blurted the red-haired one.

"You guessed it, Palmer," was the quick retort. "There's a time for all things and this wasn't the time to go in search of a lost fortune. I would have put the police on the trail with the expectation of getting results in that way."

Something in the Doctor's manner, rather than his words startled Palmer. For the first time he began to think that some misfortune had befallen his chum.

"I hope Bobby's all right," he exclaimed with a look of distress in his voice.

The principal was silent for a few moments. He stared at his finger-nails absently.

"Oh," he said reassuringly, "I suppose there's been some unexpected delay. He'll be here later on."

But the tone in which these words were uttered failed to carry conviction and as the Doctor turned and left the dressing room to resume his seat on the outside, Pinky Palmer felt something tugging at his heart-strings. He looked at the boys who were standing about him, but the one person he desired to see more than any other was not there. His mind's eye brought back visions of Bobby Benson as the young captain appeared prior to his entrance into the cage. This incident had been repeated so often that it was indelibly stamped on Palmer's mind. He stared fixedly at the place where Bobby was accustomed to stand, but alas, the boy was not there. It was the voice of Nelson James which finally aroused him from his reverie.

"Well, Palmer," he said, "we've got to go out in a few seconds. I suppose it's

understood that Tony Brill is to play in Benson's place."

"Sure," was the quick response, "and I'm sure he's going to do us all proud."

Young Brill, who was all ready for the fray, colored up at this bit of premeditated flattery. His eyes sparkled and there was a general air of expectancy over his face with its little nose that came out with such disconcerting suddenness.

"I'm going to do the best I can," he said quietly, "and I suppose that's all any fellow can do."

Before any response could be given to this remark, the summons came to appear in the arena. The boys filed out and entered the court the same moment as the Williams team came in from the other side of the cage. A storm of applause greeted the two teams. Pinky Palmer, for the moment, was overwhelmed by the heartiness of the greeting. He was still thinking in a confused sort of way of the absence of his chum. He felt as though there was a mist before his eyes, and looking out at the crowd, he could see only circles of mouths and eyes. But

there was no time for reflections or reveries. The whistle had blown and the ball was in action. The time had come to do or to die.

Captain Harkins of the Williams team was on the alert and he succeeded in getting his clutches on the sphere. He passed it to the left guard of his team. The Bell Haven boys made a desperate effort to interfere, but they failed. The ball went from one Williams player to another until the right forward of the Williams players had planted himself beneath the basket, received the ball and shot it into the basket. It was brilliant playing, well conceived and successfully executed and the spectators applauded heartily.

For the first time Palmer noticed that the Williams team was playing a new man. His name was Wally Watts and he had earned an enviable reputation as one of the cleverest forwards in any of the academic leagues. The red-haired one realized that Watts was likely to be a tower of strength to the rival team. He reflected bitterly that the Bell Haven boys were under a double handicap. They were weakened by the absence of

Bobby Benson, while the opposing team was strengthened by the acquisition of Wally Watts. However, he had neither the time nor the inclination to dwell on these things, but hastened to inject some ginger into the Bell Haven boys.

"Go to it the next time," he cried, "and show these fellows that they're not playing against a crowd of pikers."

This remark was received with jeers by the Williams boys and by shouts of laughter by the members of the Academy team. In the meantime the referee was blowing his whistle again and all of the players were preparing to get into action. The ball was thrown up and the Williams center got the jump on Tony Brill. Pinky leaped into the air and attempted to grab it, but the other side was too quick for him. Wally Watts with the speed of a deer had rushed in front of him and stretching out his long arms, grabbed the ball. He passed it along to one of his team-mates with a quickness that almost defied description. Then while the Bell Haven boys were still gasping for breath, Wally leaped forward and took a

position near the basket in time to receive the ball and toss it into the net. The crowd shouted with delight. They wanted the home team to win, but their sense of fairness, no less than a natural feeling of sportsmanship, compelled them to applaud such good playing.

It was very evident that the Williams team possessed a genuine star in Wally Watts. He was accurate in shooting both fouls and goals and the rapidity of his work was very disconcerting to the other side. Twice more, in succession, he succeeded in landing the ball in the basket and he thoroughly deserved the applause which he received from the enthusiastic crowd.

Finally, after many desperate efforts, Pinky Palmer succeeded in getting his hands on the ball and with an energy born of desperation, he passed it over to Tony Brill. The little fellow grabbed it with both hands and pressed it to his bosom as if he were determined never to let it go.

"Drop it on the floor and dribble, you chump," shrieked Palmer, losing control of himself. "Dribble! Do you hear? Dribble!"

The unexpectedness of this verbal threat stirred Tony into action. His countenance was alive with excitement and the little nose that stood out with disconcerting suddenness seemed to be challenging any man on the floor to check him in his mad flight. Down the floor he went, dribbling with an intensity that would not be denied. As he proceeded step by step the spectators were aroused to a high pitch of excitement. Presently he was beside the basket and with a vigorous swing of both arms, he threw the ball towards the goal. There was a moment of suspense. Players and spectators alike held their breath. The ball touched the lip of the basket and for one nerve-racking second it quivered on the brink—but, alas, toppled over the wrong way and fell to the floor. It was the best chance the Bell Haven boys had had to make a goal and it had failed.

After that all the breaks appeared to be against the home team. The Williams boys played with a speed and aggressiveness that astonished and dismayed their opponents. The Bell Haven boys worked hard enough,

but somehow or other, they did not work in harmony. There were frequent collisions and once the Sleeping Beauty and Tony Brill came together with such violence that they were both thrown to the floor. Again Gordon Greely misinterpeted a signal and caused such demoralization that the Williams team won three goals in succession. Nelson James, who attempted to bring order out of chaos, only succeeded in adding to the confusion. The players of the home team were thoroughly discouraged and their feelings were shared by the spectators.

There was an absence of team work and in spite of Pinky Palmer's enthusiasm, he was unable to inspire the players to their best efforts. Tony Brill worked hard, but it was very evident that he could not begin to fill the place left vacant by Bobby Benson. There was almost a sigh of relief when the whistle blew to announce the end of the first half. The score at that time stood nineteen to three in favor of the Williams team. It looked as if it was all over but the shouting, and the Williams players retired

to their dressing room, flushed with joy over their successful showing.

The Bell Haven Five marched out of the cage in single file, looking thoroughly disappointed and ashamed even so much as to raise their eyes to glance at the faces of their lamenting friends. Pinky Palmer threw himself on a bench in an attitude of extreme dejection.

"Boys," he said, "I've never felt so blue since I came to Bell Haven—I know you did your best, but I'm afraid we're up against it today."

"While there's life, there's hope," chirped Nelson James.

Pinky shook his head.

"I'd like to feel that way, old pal," he said, "but there's only one thing can save us today, and that's Bobby Benson."

CHAPTER XXIII

ADAM LOSES HIS TEMPER

THE sudden collapse of Bobby Benson in the second-story room of the Black Bear Inn startled Gus Miles. He was a desperate character and had a long string of crimes to his discredit, but he did not relish the possibility of being hounded as a murderer. Getting down on his hands and knees, he felt the boy's pulse. It was beating feebly, but that was sufficient to reassure the criminal. He had no pity for the boy and thought only of his own safety. The question now was how to escape as quickly as possible without attracting the attention of the landlord or any of the loungers about the country inn.

He glanced out the window and no one was in sight except the stupid lout, who was watering the horses near the barn. After that the Weasel tip-toed across to the door and opening it slightly, looked up and down

the corridor. It was deserted. He felt in his pocket to reassure himself of the presence of the twelve one hundred dollar bills, and then buttoning his coat and picking up his gripsack, he started along the hallway. The coast appeared to be clear, and he walked down the stairs leading to the office with something like a sense of satisfaction.

Just as he reached the desk there was a commotion outside of the place and the doors were violently thrown open and two men entered. One was Adam West, his clothes disordered and bespattered with mud, and his homely face showing traces of agitation. The man with him was tall, slim, well-built, and had an evident air of authority. Both of them noticed Gus Miles as they came into the inn and the janitor thrust out his long arm and pointed his hand in the direction of the convict.

"There's the man," he exclaimed in a voice that trembled with excitement, "and if I'm not all-fired mistaken, we've just got here in the nick of time."

The criminal's face, which was always white, seemed to go a shade paler. His

small bloodshot eyes danced with fear. He appeared to shrivel and grow small, but this temporary agitation quickly disappeared. He had been in close corners before and there was always the possibility of escape.

"What's the matter," he said, trying to seem at ease.

"You know darned well what's the matter," was the excited retort, "and the best thing you kin do is to git ready to occupy one of them 6 by 9 cells up at Hedgewater."

The landlord of the hotel had appeared by this time and a number of loungers came into the room and formed a circle around the chief characters in the little drama. Miles turned to the head of the house and said in a tone of annoyance:

"I don't know these people and I'll thank you to see that I'm not disturbed."

"Yes, you do," shouted Adam; "you know me blamed well and I'll give you a knock-down to my friend here. This is Detective Clay of Hedgewater and he's come to notify you to partake of the hospi-

tality of the county jail. After a judge and jury gits a chance at you we may let you take free board and lodgin' at the penitentiary."

At the mention of the detective's name, Miles gave a start. Quickly recovering, he laughed in a mirthless way.

"You talk as if you needed a doctor. I've got no time to bother with you," and as he spoke he made a sudden move through the crowd of loungers and started for the side door of the inn on a run.

The unexpectedness of this move dazed Adam West, but the detective was too quick for the criminal. He made a flying leap and got between the door and the fleeing man. Seeing this means of escape cut off, the Weasel wheeled around, made a hop, skip and jump, and started up the stairway.

"Don't let him get away," shouted Clay. "That's Gus Miles the escaped convict."

With a bound, the detective was after him, followed by the janitor, the landlord and the crowd of spectators. The Weasel reached the top of the stairs in safety and

then turning abruptly, hurled his gripsack at his pursuers. The thing struck the detective square in the face and as he staggered backward, he bumped against Adam, who collided with the others. The men in the rear, being unprepared for this, fell down like so many ten-pins. Shouts and imprecations filled the air. In the midst of the excitement, the officer regained his balance and once again started in pursuit of the criminal. Miles had no idea where to go. The door of room 13 was slightly ajar and instinctively he made for that as a possible refuge. Just as he reached it, he remembered that the unconscious boy was lying on the floor and the prospect of being caught there with his victim, made him halt. That moment of indecision cost him his liberty. Before he could make a fresh start, the detective had pounced on him and had pinned both arms behind his back in a mighty grip.

"Put your hands in my pocket," gasped the officer to the janitor who had just joined him, "and get a pair of handcuffs."

Adam West obeyed the command. It

was dark in the hallway and he had to fumble around for some moments before he secured the bits of glittering steel. The detective released the arms of his prisoner for a moment and then said sharply:

"Hold out your hands."

The Weasel did so sullenly and the next moment the handcuffs were snapped about his wrists.

"Now we've got you," cried the detective. "I want you to tell me what you've done with this man's money."

The red-rimmed eyes blinked, but the prisoner refused to speak.

"The money was in one of the three chairs," suggested Adam, "and I don't know whether this fellow's got it or not."

"Oh, he's got it, all right," was the confident assertion of the detective, "and he's going to tell us where it is."

"No, I won't," was the defiant retort.

"Well, we'll search him," said Clay, and suiting the action to the words he began to go through the pockets of the prisoner.

The crowd stood around breathlessly

watching the performance. The officer put his hand into the inside coat pocket of the Weasel and produced a wallet. He opened it and pulled out twelve one hundred dollar bills.

"That's my money, all right," exclaimed Adam; "but what I'd like to know more than anything else is, what's become of Bobby Benson?"

The detective noticed the open door of room 13 and he turned to the landlord and said in an authoritative way:

"We'll go in here where we can get some light. In the meantime send that crowd down-stairs."

The keeper of the inn shooed the crowd away, while Detective Clay and Adam pushed their way into the room. Miles walked over to the window and peered outside as though he might still be thinking of some means of escape. The detective watched him closely and Adam, who was very much excited, suddenly discovered the body of Benson lying on the floor. He gave a gasp of horror.

"There's the boy now," he exclaimed in

a trembling voice, "and it looks as if he's been hurt."

He dropped down on his knees and put his arms around Benson's shoulders and shook him.

"Bobby, Bobby," he cried hoarsely, "it's me — it's Adam — why don't you answer? Why don't you say something?"

The young captain of the Bell Haven Five seemed to be lifeless. The old man felt dazed. There was a strange swelling in his throat. He swallowed with difficulty two or three times and then the tears began to run down his venerable cheeks.

"Bobby, Bobby," he called, "please say something—if you don't, you'll break my heart."

His grief filled the room. His hands were trembling and his head was bowed. Suddenly there came a violent reaction. Sorrow gave way to anger. In a second he seemed to throw off his years. He arose to his feet with the swiftness of a young man. He towered to his full height and glaring at the abject, crouching figure of

the criminal in the corner of the room, he shouted at the top of his voice:

"This is your work, you miserable dog, but you've got to answer for it right here and now," and thrusting both hands out, he made a dash for the Weasel.

Miles was shivering from head to foot as though he had been stricken with ague. He gave a pitiful whine that sounded more like the cry of a beast than a human being.

"He's goin' to murder me," he wailed; "he's goin' to murder me and I can't help myself."

But before the old man could reach the shivering creature, Detective Clay had interposed. He made a rush and placed himself between the infuriated janitor and the criminal.

"Keep your head, old man—keep your head," he cried with a decision that could not be denied; "you've got no right to take the law into your own hands."

Adam's arms dropped limply to his sides and his head sunk on his breast. The landlord had appeared in the doorway by

this time and the detective, seeing him, called out:

"Get a basin of water and come up here right away."

For once the inn-keeper seemed to be equal to the occasion. He rushed down the hallway and in less time than seemed possible he reappeared with a tin cup filled with water which he dashed into the face of the prostrate boy. There was a convulsive shiver and the next moment a fluttering of eyelids and Bobby looked up and wondered at the men who were standing about him. He recognized the venerable one and smiled feebly.

"Hello, Adam," he said faintly, "I'm mighty glad to see you."

Adam was by his side in a second, patting his hands with rapture, his eyes dancing and his face fairly transfigured.

"You're not half so glad to see me as I am to hear your voice," he cried in broken tones, "and if we can get a doctor, we'll bring you around in three shakes of a lamb's tail."

Bobby raised himself up and looked

around the room. Presently his gaze fell upon the prisoner and he noticed the glistening handcuffs. He smiled faintly.

"I see you've given our friend a pair of steel pulse-warmers."

"Curse you!" exclaimed the convict. "You're the cause of this. If it hadn't been for you, I'd made a get-away, all right."

"Sorry to have detained you," was the sarcastic rejoinder, and with an anxious glance in the direction of Adam: "Did you get your money?"

"You bet I did—every dollar of it, and I'd sooner have lost it all than have anything happen to you."

"I'm satisfied," smiled the boy. "It proves that you can do almost anything if you try hard enough."

Detective Clay stepped forward and put his arm around Adam's shoulder.

"I don't know which of you deserves the most credit," he said, "but you certainly helped me and helped the cause of justice. I've been on the track of this man for a week. I didn't know anything

about the money—all I was after was an escaped convict and I had luck enough to fall in with our old friend here who put me on the trail, but neither of us could have gotten away with the trick if it hadn't been for you, sonny."

"I guess I'll have to thank you," interposed the boy. "You just got here in time to prevent the fellow from escaping."

The detective seemed to be lost in thought. He put his hands in his pockets and made two or three turns of the room.

"I suppose you know," he said finally, "that there was a reward of one hundred dollars for the arrest of Gus Miles?"

"Yes," replied the boy, "I read it on a poster this afternoon."

The detective folded his arms and gazed at Bobby intently.

"You're lucky," he said. "You're a hundred dollars to the good."

The boy shivered and looked in a sympathetic way towards the criminal.

"Not much," he said finally. "I wouldn't touch that money for the world. I couldn't bear to think of being on a man

hunt. All I wanted to do was to recover Adam's fortune. You can have the reward. I give it up in your favor."

"Thank you, sonny, thank you," exclaimed the detective, "I think I can use it very conveniently in my business."

After that the boy was lifted into bed and Adam bathed his head and talked to him as a mother might to a helpless infant.

"You're the finest boy that ever lived," he murmured, "and if you ever dare to run into danger again, I'll thrash you within an inch of your life."

Bobby chuckled at this quaint expression of love.

"It's all right, Adam," he said, "but if you really want to do something for me, you'll get me to Bell Haven in time to play that basketball game with Williams Academy."

While this was going on the detective was escorting his prisoner down-stairs. He had a vehicle in readiness and after leaving instructions with the landlord, he drove away with his prize.

It was not necessary to secure the services

of a doctor for Bobby. Between the devotion of the janitor and the assistance of the landlord, the boy speedily recovered his senses and his strength. He wanted to start for home at once, but was persuaded that this was not only dangerous but unnecessary.

"What you need," said the janitor, "is a good night's rest. It's purty late now and I want you to go to sleep. We'll stay here for the night and I'll see that you git to the Academy in time to knock the daylight out of that Williams bunch."

The old man and the boy were up bright and early and did ample justice to a first-class country breakfast. After consulting a time-table, it was found that they could get a train back to Bell Haven at eleven-thirty in the morning. Benson chafed at the delay, but was assured that this would bring him home a full half hour before the beginning of the game. After the score had been settled with the hotel keeper, they took the trolley to Hedgewater. They reached there in ample time to get the train. They boarded it in the best of spirits and

filled with eager interest over the adventures through which they had passed. The express was five minutes late, but the conductor, when he came through for their tickets, informed them that the engineer would be sure to make up the lost time.

Bobby and Adam spent their time in discussing the events of the previous twenty-four hours. It was hard to tell which of them took the greatest delight in recounting the various experiences through which they had passed. The boy, however, was restless and uneasy. He constantly consulted his watch and wondered if they would be able to reach Bell Haven on time.

"You're worse than a hen on a hot griddle," laughed the janitor. "I figured this all out with the landlord and I know that it'll be all right. Two heads is better than one, even though one is a puddin' head."

At that moment there was a terrific crash, followed by the sound of escaping steam. The two of them were thrown from their seats onto the floor. Then there was silence. Shouts of dismay could be heard

from the direction of the engine. Bobby and Adam made their way carefully down the aisle and out on the platform. The conductor of the train rushed along the side of the roadway.

"What's the matter?" cried Adam.

"Matter enough," cried the uniformed one with an oath, "we've crashed into an empty freight car."

Bobby and his companion climbed down the steps of the car and went ahead to investigate. It proved to be a serious accident, although, fortunately, no one was killed or injured. The remains of the empty car were strewn across the track and the engineer and the fireman were holding a consultation as to the quickest way to telegraph for help. Bobby pulled out his watch. It was after twelve o'clock. Visions of the Bell Haven basketball team preparing to enter the cage flashed through his mind. He turned to the brakeman, who was approaching.

"How far is it to Bell Haven?" he asked.

"About twenty miles, as the crow flies," was the reply.

"How long will it take before the wreck can be cleared away?"

"We'll be lucky if we get out of here within the next two or three hours," was the curt rejoinder.

"How in the world can I get to the Academy?" implored the boy.

"Give it up," was the retort with a mirthless laugh, "but if you expect to get there today, I guess you'd better walk."

CHAPTER XXIV

BETTER LATE THAN NEVER

WHILE Bobby Benson stood there with a look of unutterable woe in his big brown eyes, the conductor and engineer of the train became involved in a dispute regarding the cause of the accident.

"There wasn't any excuse for this accident," blurted the uniformed ticket collector.

"What do you know about it?" retorted the grimy-faced one. "That empty freight just skirted the edge of our track. I don't know how it got down there. It looked all right to me, so I went ahead, and there you are."

"Say," interrupted Adam, "you fellows ain't helpin' yourselves by spoutin' off a lot of hot air. The mischief's done now and if you've got an ounce of sense in your heads—which I very much doubt—you'll

try to clean up this mess as soon as possible. In the meantime, I'd like to know how we're goin' to git out of this forsaken hole?"

"That's up to you," snapped the conductor. "You pretend to know a whole lot. Now just try how it feels taking care of yourself."

Bobby smiled in spite of the plight in which he found himself.

"A word to the wise is as good as a kick," he remarked, "and the best thing we can do is to try and find out just where we've been stranded."

"Yep," replied the old man, "that's the way to talk. What we want to get now is our latitude and our longitude and after that we'll know what course to steer."

Benson did not hear these words. He was looking off in the distance at a column of smoke that was curling in the air. He pointed to it eagerly.

"I guess it's worth investigating," cried Adam, answering the unspoken suggestion. "Where there's so much smoke there must be a fire, and where there's a fire, there's likely to be a fire-place, and I never knew

a fire-place that wasn't surrounded by a building."

Benson chuckled at the dry humor of his companion.

"That sounds a little like an imitation of the house that Jack built, but it's all right just the same. Let's follow the smoke and see what we can find."

The two of them proceeded in the direction of the dark gray column which cast a smudge across the face of the bright blue sky. They walked a half a mile before meeting either man or beast. Presently a farmer came trudging along.

"Hello, neighbor," cried Adam, "what do you call this place?"

"It hain't got a name yet," was the shrewd response, "but it leads to a half dozen different places."

"Where are we?"

The agriculturist relieved himself of a mouthful of tobacco juice before replying.

"I reckon," he said, "that you're about forty miles from nowhere."

Adam was losing his temper.

"Can't we get a wagon of any kind

aound here?" he cried. "Can we get anything?"

The farmer nodded.

"If you'll jist follow your nose for another quarter of a mile, you'll bump into a garage."

This bit of information restored the janitor's good humor at once. He caught Bobby by the arm.

"Let's hurry, son—for all you know, we may reach Bell Haven in time for that game."

"Quite possible, Adam, but I haven't any money for automobiles—they come high."

The white-bearded one chuckled.

"They come high," he repeated, "but we must have 'em, and there ain't anything too good for you, son, and you kin jist bet that Adam West ain't goin' to let you walk while he's carryin' a roll of bank notes."

Between his joy at the prospect of reaching Bell Haven on time and his reluctance to have Adam spend any part of his fortune, the boy's emotions were dreadfully conflicting. He did not know what to say and

remained silent. They trudged along the dust-carpeted road for about ten minutes and then came in sight of a garage and automobile station.

The manager, a stout man wearing a sweater over his other clothes, greeted them cordially. Adam lost no time in getting down to business.

"We want a fust class motor-car to take us to Bell Haven. How long will it take and how much will it cost?"

The man pulled out his watch and gazed at it thoughtfully.

"It's almost one o'clock now and if we have luck, you ought to get to Bell Haven a little after two."

The janitor looked at the boy.

"The first half of the game will be started by that time," said Bobby, answering the unspoken query, "but it's better late than never and I'd like to be there."

"What will you charge us, neighbor?" asked Adam, stroking his beard.

The man was silent for some moments. He looked his visitors over shrewdly and then said:

"I've only got one car here and I've made a half promise to rent it to a man that expects it around three o'clock."

"What's the use of looking so fur ahead," expostulated Adam. "Fust come ought to be fust served. I'll take the machine—what do you want for it?"

"Fifty dollars," said the automobile man.

"What?" shrieked Bobby Benson. "We only want to hire the tin can. We don't want to buy it."

Adam scratched his ear reflectively.

"I guess he thinks we're a couple of hayseeds," he remarked.

"Come on," said Bobby angrily, to the janitor, "I wouldn't stand for any highway robbery like that. I'd walk first."

Adam hesitated for a moment and then went ahead with the boy. They had not gone many yards before the man called them back.

"I'll be a sport," he said with a chuckle; "what are you willing to give to go to Bell Haven?"

"Do you furnish the driver?" asked Adam.

"Sure thing."

"Then I'll give you ten dollars."

The fellow laughed mirthlessly.

"You're cheap sports," he said. "What you want is a horse and buggy. You can hire that for three dollars and it'll get you in Bell Haven some time next week."

Adam looked at the humorist out of his shrewd old eyes and said:

"Well, I suppose you're willing to split the difference?"

"Right you are. I'll give it to you for thirty dollars."

"Nothing doing," said Adam, "but as long as you show a disposition to meet me half way, I'll try to reciprocate. I'll give you twenty dollars and that's the last word I've got to say."

"It's yours," quickly snapped the other, "and I'll have it ready for you in about five minutes by the town clock."

It was fifteen minutes instead of five before the machine was ready to start. Adam surprised everybody by pulling out a roll of bills and giving the garage manager two ten-dollar bank notes.

"How did you get the change?" asked Benson in an undertone.

"Got it at the hotel," was the confidential reply. "I sent that detective fifty dollars as a reward for his work. I thought it was worth it. I wouldn't want him to think I was a tight-wad, you know."

Bobby laughed at this frank confession on the part of his old friend, but before he had an opportunity of making any reply, the automobile was ready to start. The chauffeur knew the country and he went ahead with a swiftness and assurance that inspired confidence in his two passengers. They had not gone many miles before Adam leaned over and slipped him a five-dollar bill.

"This boy wants to get into Bell Haven by two o'clock," he whispered, "and if you can accommodate him, I'll remember you in my will."

The driver laughed.

"I don't think it's possible, but I'll get there as soon after two as I can."

As he spoke he speeded up the machine and in a few seconds the car was whizzing along at a rate which made conversation

almost impossible. Telegraph poles, farm houses, barns and corn fields shot by so quickly that their very existence seemed questionable. Adam and Bobby were thoughtful and silent. Each in his own way was picturing the greeting they would receive when they reached the Academy.

Bobby was so nervous that he could scarcely keep still. He pulled out his watch repeatedly and each time restored it to his pocket with a sigh. They had been making splendid time, but it was two o'clock now and they had not even reached the outskirts of Cleverly.

But the longest journey has its end. Presently the familiar roads of the town came in sight. After that it was only a few minutes before they rode into Bell Haven. Bobby looked at his time-piece again and found that it was twenty minutes after two. He was almost distracted, but in spite of that a mental picture of the Academy gymnasium flashed before his eyes. He could see the two teams at play and wondered which was in the lead. At this point a pedestrian attempted to cross the roadway

in front of the car. The driver turned the handle of his steering gear in order to avoid an accident. Quickly the car shot up on the side of the curb and the next moment came down with a crash.

The sudden stopping of the car hurled Bobby from his seat. He fell against the door, dashing it open, and went sprawling on his hands and face in the graveled roadway. The next instant, to make matters worse, there was a loud explosion and they realized that one of the tires of the automobile had burst. The chauffeur and the janitor picked Bobby up and took him to a nearby drug store where he was patched and put into presentable condition with the aid of washes and liniments and an abundance of court plaster.

"The car can't go any further, Bobby," said Adam mournfully.

"But *we* can," protested the boy. "It's only a few blocks away and I propose to leg it there."

Even before the venerable one could make reply, he had started on his way, running at the top of his speed. Adam could not keep

up with the boy, but he followed as quickly as his rheumatic limbs would permit. At the gate of the Academy Bobby was met by a barking dog, who insisted on jumping up and licking his hands and making other manifestations of canine delight. But the boy had no time to waste on Tramp. He went on his way, divesting himself of coat, vest, collar and tie as he proceeded. He got into the gymnasium just as the Bell Haven Five were entering the cage for the second half of the game.

Bobby had no time to uniform himself properly, but picking up a jersey with the initials of the Bell Haven team on its front, he pulled it over his head. The next moment he had drawn off his shoes and put on a pair of basketball sneakers.

A few seconds later the crowd was enthusiastically cheering the entrance of a boy whose face was cut and bleeding and covered with court plaster. No one seemed surprised except the members of the Williams team. The Bell Haven players accepted the spectacular return of their young captain as a matter of course. The

impossible had happened. It was like a miracle, but they never stopped to question it. Instead of that they rallied around Benson with an enthusiasm that spelled victory.

From the moment Bobby entered the cage he was on the aggressive. He played with a fury born of desperation. Once, twice, three times in succession he made what might be called impossible goals. The crowd shrieked and yelled and applauded in sympathy. They fairly rocked in their seats and the noise that came from the benches was as music in the ears of the Bell Haven Five.

Tony Brill, who had quietly withdrawn on the entrance of the captain, peered through the wire screen and shouted words of encouragement to his team-mates.

"Boys, you're making history," he shrieked. "Keep it up and this game will be talked about by your children's children."

The Williams players were totally disconcerted by the savage onslaught of their opponents. They fumbled and blundered and could not add a single point to their score. Bobby Benson appeared to be

everywhere and Pinky Palmer, the Sleeping Beauty and the other members of the team surrounded him and whooped like a band of wild Indians. Slowly the score mounted. Goal after goal was made until the figures finally stood 19 to 19. But another minute remained before the conclusion of the game. The time-keeper pulled out his whistle and at that moment Benson made a spectacular dash and grabbing the ball from the hands of Captain Harkins of the Williams team, sent it into the yawning opening of the basket.

It was a victory snatched from the very jaws of defeat and as the time-keeper blew the whistle which declared the finish of the game, the crowd rose in their seats, yelling with delight, while the members of the Bell Haven team threw their arms around Bobby Benson and threatened to smother him with their demonstrations of affection.

CHAPTER XXV

ADAM GIVES A PARTY

TWO weeks after the great basketball victory, there were wonderful goings and comings about the house where Adam West made his home. Mrs. Bowen was in a flutter of excitement and was heard to say several times that if anything went wrong, it wouldn't be her fault. The white-bearded janitor, who was helping the confectioner to deliver a large can of ice cream, overheard his landlady and remarked sagely:

"There won't nothin' go wrong. I hain't given an affair of this kind since I had my freedom party as a young fellow of twenty-one, but you kin jist bet all you like that I know just how it ought to be done."

The epochal event in the history of the Academy was being given in honor of the Bell Haven Five and each member of the team and all of the substitutes graced it with their presence. Dr. Maury, Tiberius Brown

and Mike Murray, the athletic guide of the school, were the special guests of honor. The only one invited who was unable to come was Sam Simon, better known as Skinny, the tin peddler, whose purchase of the three black horse-hair chairs had threatened the loss of Adam West's fortune and involved Bobby Benson in the most thrilling adventure of his life. He responded, however, with a characteristic letter, which was read aloud for the benefit of the company by Tiberius Brown. The professor was at his best in making the contents of the epistle known. His elocutionary efforts were the signal for a storm of applause. The letter said:

THE WIDE, WIDE WORLD.

DEAR OLD PAL:

An important engagement with a wagon-load of tin-ware will stop me from bein' with you at your party. As a general thing, I look on parties as all-fired frivolous things, but there is exceptions to the rule and yours is one of 'em. I hope the boys will have a bully good time and that you will give them a lot of advice—especially about what a fool thing it is to use stove-pipes

and such things instid of the Fust National Bank, which is one of the improvements of every fust-class town.

Give my regards to the Queen of her Sex—I mean Mrs. Bowen, your landlady. She sells the richest stuffed chairs in creation. If she jammed her Christmas turkey with that green goods fillin', she'd have more boarders than her house would hold.

Remember me to the lad that saved your cash for you—he'll get along in the world, all right, all right.

Your affectionate friend,

SAM SIMON.

P. S. Tell Mrs. Bowen if she wants anything in the tin-ware line, I'll be around next month. Anything taken in exchange from a baby's rattle to a flat, four-legged piano.

S. S.

The dinner, which was the special feature of the evening's entertainment, was a tribute alike to Mrs. Bowen's culinary skill and Adam West's prodigality. When this was tactfully referred to by some of the guests, the venerable one smiled broadly and said whimsically, if somewhat proudly:

"This was one of the times when I didn't give a darn about the expense."

Bobby Benson was called on to tell the story of "the adventure of the twelve one-hundred dollar bills," and after that Mike Murray made a few remarks concerning the splendid victory of the Bell Haven Five. Forbes, who proved himself the possessor of a good strong bass voice, delighted the company by singing, "Rocked in the Cradle of the Deep."

"You might know that Forbsey would pick out a song about sleep," chuckled Pinky Palmer. "He takes to snooze the way some men take to booze."

Dr. Maury made a pleasant little speech in which he took occasion to congratulate the boys on the manly spirit which always prevailed at Bell Haven. He assured them that they were not model boys by any means, but that he could testify that they had never been guilty of any small or contemptible actions. He concluded by saying that they did well to celebrate such a double event as the winning of the pennant and the recovery of Adam West's fortune. "It

was a case," he added, "of killing two birds with the one stone."

The white-haired one arose at that and stroked his frosted beard thoughtfully.

"I don't know as I care so much about that killin'-two-birds-with-one-stone proverb," he smiled. "A friend of mine tried it once and when he had come to count the consequences, he had smashed a plate glass window and hit a trick mule behind the ear."

Roars of laughter greeted this homely illustration, followed by cries of "speech—speech." Adam held up his hand to quell the uproar.

"Dr. Maury has been kind enough not to say anything about my darn fool way of losin' money," he began, "and I sure do appreciate his kindness. If there's one pest wuss than anything else in this world, it is the fellow that says, 'I told you so.'"

"Hear, hear," cried the Sleeping Beauty in the exuberance of his joy.

"But I want to say," continued Adam, "that I've learned my lesson an' I've followed his advice. I've invested a thousand dollars of that fortune of mine in a bond an'

if you don't believe me, cast your eyes on this bit of decorated paper," and as he spoke he waved a formidable looking document at the company.

"Three cheers for Adam West!" screamed Bobby Benson, and they were given with a will.

"An' that brings me to the subject of my text," resumed the venerable one with unfailing good-humor. "After payin' all the expenses of the hunt for that money an' buyin' the bond, I still have a hundred dollars left. Now what do you 'spose I'm goin' to do with it?"

"Give it up," came in chorus from the laughing boys.

"I'll be the goat," chirped Pinky Palmer. "What are you going to do with it?"

Adam threw out his chest and squared his shoulders before replying.

"I'm going to give it to the Athletic Association of the Bell Haven Academy!" he declared.

The way the youngsters cheered and shouted and the manner in which they marched up, one after another, and shook

his hand, and the heartiness with which they slapped him on the back, brought a lump in the patriarch's throat and a mist before his eyes and caused him to murmur in broken tones:

"God bless you, boys—every mother's son of you!"

THE END